LETTERS

ON

ENGLAND.

1558

BY

VICTOIRE, COUNT DE SOLIGNY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE

BY

THE TRANSLATOR.

The Public cannot be curious to know the circumstances which have placed in my hands the Letters, from which the following are a selection; or why they were not published in France, and are published here. They have pleased me, and I have been willing to think they may please others. This, if not my reason for publishing them, is at least my excuse. But, in order that the reader may not expect what he will not find, it may be necessary to say something of the writer of them: of the Letters themselves I had better say but little; for translators are generally the worst judges in the world of what they translate. The writer of these Letters

is my friend; therefore I cannot safely trust myself to speak of what he *is*: but I will venture to say a few words of what he *is not*. He is not, then, that *lusus naturæ*, a citizen of the world: he used sometimes to long for his home and his friends, like the merest schoolboy. He is not a politician: I do not think he could tell the date of the battle of Leipsic; and he has not mentioned the name of Napoleon once, either to bless or curse it. (I wonder whether this latter can be asserted of any book, on any subject, that has been written by any French man or woman, during the last twenty years?) My friend is least of all a philosopher: he used sometimes to talk and think of *this* world, and the things of it, as if he really believed that there might possibly be another!— The secret of all these deficiencies is, perhaps, to be found in another of his negative qualities: he is not a PARISIAN. He passed the early part of his life in the metropolis; but had quitted it for some years before he came to England, and had resided with his family in one of those elegant retirements

in which France is so rich, but which so few of her people seem to know the value of.

If, after this, any one should desire to know more of my friend, it must be sought in his Letters; which, as far as they go, are transcripts of himself. I will be frank: if they have his faults,—one of which, and that the most conspicuous in these Letters, is the habit of feeling rather too quickly, and judging too hastily,—they are also not without his good qualities; the chief of which is, that he has an eye and a heart for goodness and beauty wherever he finds them: though he is pretty sure, as every one ought to be, that, generally speaking, they nowhere exist in such abundance and perfection as in *his own* country. But if in these Letters he has seen and felt things through a medium which has discoloured them a little, and changed their positions, it has not distorted their forms. Finally, the best of my friend is, that he is always the most delighted when he can most admire.

If some persons, wiser than their neighbours, should discover that these Letters are superficial, egotistical, colloquial, and so forth, it will only be saying, in other words, that they are exactly what they pretend to be,—namely, familiar Letters to dear and intimate friends; the pleasure of writing and of reading, which results from the privilege of saying exactly what one feels and thinks, exactly in the manner and at the moment that one actually feels and thinks it. The writer did not set up for an instructor. He wrote to please himself by pleasing his friends; and he wrote with confidence, because he was pretty sure that whatever he wrote *would* please them. But he pretended to express, not what he thought they or anybody else must or ought to feel, but simply *what he himself felt*.

One word of the translation. I will confess that I have taken some pains with it. In fact, I did it partly as an experiment, to try whether, by translating the sense instead of the

OIII, 4 Sol. A23.1

language—by giving equivalent *phrases* instead of equivalent *words*—I might not produce a something which should be a perfect transcript of the original, and yet have no appearance of being a translation. Accordingly, I have not been much surprised to learn that some over-sagacious persons pretend to have discovered (from those few of the following Letters which have already appeared in print under a feigned name,*) that they were actually written in the English language, and have never been soiled by the inky fingers of a post-office clerk at all. This is, to be sure, a somewhat gratuitous supposition; yet, if it had pleased any one to believe it, he might have been very welcome for me. If he had insisted on my being a cleverer person than I pretend to be, I could have had no reason to object to that;—only, as I do not claim the credit of any good the Letters may contain, I should

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* In the New Monthly Magazine: they consist of the first nineteen Letters in the first volume, and the description of Oxford in the second.

certainly have protested against being made responsible for any of the erroneous opinions that may be imputed to them. However, to prevent the necessity of this, my friend has, with some difficulty, been prevailed on to let his name appear in the title page; and the rather, as it is a name which, from his retired habits, is likely to be almost as little known in his own country as it is here.

Finally, the Letters, such as they are, have been written and translated to please our friends, and, in so doing, to please ourselves; and they have succeeded. If they should be equally fortunate with the Public, the writer of them will, I dare say, believe that much of the credit of their success is due to me; and I shall know that it all belongs to him, and we shall both be satisfied.

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LETTERS

ON

ENGLAND.

LETTER I.

Dieppe, Thursday, Sept. 18, 1817.

My dear Claire,

Contrary to your predictions, the attractions of Paris did not detain us a single day from the ultimate object of our journey. Thus, it turns out, that you do not know us quite so well as you would have us believe. The truth is, that, as neither C—— nor I pride ourselves on the strength of our resolutions when temptations are in the way, we were pretty sure that, if we allowed Paris to detain us *one* day, there would be no answering for the extent of its influence; so, with a prospective prudence, which you will no doubt think very creditable to us, at Ville-Juif we paid our postilions for

three or four stages forward, and bidding them drive *through* Paris, pulled up the blinds of the carriage, and, as it was getting dark, silently composed ourselves into our respective corners; thus contriving to slip through the fingers of the enemy, against whom we might perhaps have failed in making a successful resistance. There is no denying that one of us—(I can only answer for one) did not sleep very soundly as he felt himself rattling over the pavé of the metropolis of the world; and he has a faint recollection of having been once or twice on the point of waking his companion, to consult with him on the inexpediency of proceeding further that evening; intending to hint at the little chance there was of meeting with fitting accommodation at a country village, and to expatiate on the dangers of damp beds, the miseries of short suppers, and so forth. But perhaps all this occurred to him in a dream. Certain it is, however, that we both retained our corners silently till we had passed the Barriere de St. Denis, and felt ourselves on the *terre* again. Probably it was this change from noise to comparative silence that waked us both; for we now soon found that we both *were* awake, and ready to consult on where we should pass the night. In pursuance of a sudden thought of C——, we agreed to turn out of our road, and sleep at Montmorency, that we might idle away a few hours there in the morning,

for the sake of him who idled away some of the least unhappy years of his life there.* We left Montmorency in the middle of Monday, supped at Ecouis, and then travelled on for the rest of the night, to make up for what you will call our *lost* time; arriving at Rouen early on Tuesday morning, where we staid till to-day.

You know Normandy is one of my chief favourites among our provinces, as Rouen is among the cities. There is infinite character about the latter, with its majestic cathedral, its noble boulevards, and its air of fresh, and, as it were, youthful antiquity; and the former abounds in every variety of picturesque beauty. I hastened to the top of Mount St. Catherine as soon as we arrived, and found the view from thence, as it was when we saw it together five years ago, unrivalled by any thing I have seen elsewhere, or ever expect to see, for extent, richness, and variety; and the beautiful Seine still winds through the midst of it, studded with all her lovely little islands: one of which, as you may remember, a person whom you know, when he was a little more addicted to reading and acting romance than he is now, fell in love with, and talked of buying and building a house upon; and was only prevented from doing so, by accidentally learning that he must be content to put up with the slight incon-

* Rousseau.—Tr.

venience of having his meadow and garden under water all the winter, not to mention the lower rooms of his projected chateau. I paid a visit of compliment to the spot nevertheless, in return for the fancies and images (looking as fresh and green as itself) that it called back to me.

The splendid costumes of the peasantry of this province also remain unchanged; and the females are still, without exception, the finest race in France. In both these respects a market-day at Rouen presents a more interesting subject for contemplation than perhaps any thing else of the kind.

On leaving this city, and proceeding towards the coast, the extreme beauty of some of the female faces that you meet with, has seemed even more striking to me now than when I first observed it. We have seen three or four that were absolute models of perfection, as to form, feature, complexion, &c. It is true they are deficient in that peculiar expression which is so much sought after in France; but I am not at all sure that the perfectly tranquil and unconscious air, which usually reigns in their divine faces, is not superior in every respect to this boasted piquancy; and I am sure that it is infinitely more poetical.

We reached Dieppe this morning, and intend sailing for Brighton to-night. On account of the extreme characteristic costume, style of build-

ing, &c. Dieppe is certainly the best port we could have chosen, to embark from. The last impressions we shall thus take with us from France, will no doubt afford the more striking contrasts when we arrive on the other side: and it is from contrasts chiefly that the mere external and immediate excitement and pleasure of travelling arise.

Adieu, till we find ourselves in England.

V. S.

LETTER II.

Brighton, Friday, Sept. 19, 1817.

In spite of all the fools and philosophers that ever thought or wrote, bodily pain is the greatest evil attendant on humanity. Perhaps it is the only real one. For myself, I think it is. Against all the evils which spring from the mind of man, the mind itself—omnipotent in its own sphere—furnishes, or at least possesses, the antidote. In the evils, so called, which are engendered by the passions and affections, those who choose to look for them may recognize the elements of all that is beautiful in the human character: evils without which the moral world could no more preserve its healthfulness and perfection, than the physical world could without winds, thunder clouds, and earthquakes. But corporal pain, in its beginning, its continuation, and its end, is the source of unmixed mischief. It shuts up the winged spirit in the dark, narrow, and pestiferous dungeon of the flesh. It concentrates all the energies and emotions of the mind and heart upon

the one indivisible point of self; where, not having space to breathe or to look abroad, they stagnate, and corrupt, and perish. In the violent extremes of danger, the affections frequently step forth in all their beauty: the friend looks to his friend, and is tranquil; the mother hangs over her child, and forgets there is any other being in the world; the lover clings to the form or the image of his mistress, and is happy. But in the torture of acute bodily pain, or the death-like languor of disease, every thing external is shut out: the charities of life wither; its very delicacies, which are an instinct in the female character, are forgotten; the strengths of our nature become weaknesses, and its weaknesses rise up into strengths; and self—mean, miserable, *bodily* self—opens, and spreads, and covers every thing. If there is one general law of our nature in which the wisdom is not apparent, it is that which makes disease the constant companion of a death-bed: thus depriving us of the best beauty of the human character, precisely at the moment when we more than ever seem to need it; leaving nothing but its worst deformity.

You'll wonder how I've been led to make these reflections. But you will cease to wonder when you come to be imprisoned, as I have just been, for twenty-six hours in an English packet-boat. Let those who possess and would retain a tolerable

opinion of human nature avoid this earthly, or rather watery pandemonium. It is a test which nothing can withstand.

We landed here two hours ago, and surrendered ourselves at discretion to the first persons who were in wait to lay hands on us. They conducted us to a hotel, where we now are; C—— with his unchangeable good-humour; but I, ill, fatigued, spiritless, out of temper, and disposed to dislike every thing and every body about me. How is this? Shall I confess? My mind, and the weak frame to which it is linked, are on the shores of England; but half the energies that keep them healthful, and almost all the thoughts and affections that make them happy, have returned to the flowers, the trees, and the waterfalls of V——. "He'll be better and happier to-morrow, if the sun shines," I hear A—— say; and she's always right. She knows him better than he does himself. Good night! I don't know why it is, but when my head is on my pillow, and my eyes are closed, and I hear nothing about me but my own breathings, wherever my body may be, my spirit is sure to be at V——.

Saturday.

A—— was right. I got up this morning, and walked out; and the sun *did* shine,—and the sea glittered under it,—and the little children were

bathing or playing about on the sands, or riding ponies or asses on the shore; gaily dressed people, with their brisk morning faces, were passing and repassing here and there; the fishermen were spreading their nets to dry, and their wives sitting mending them, on a beautiful piece of turf in the centre of the town looking to the sea; the houses, I thought, had every where a peculiarly happy look, unlike any thing I had seen before:—and I *was* better and happier. I looked once or twice across the sea for the shores of France, but I cou'dn't see them; and I don't know whether I wasn't *trying* to be melancholy again; but just then I caught a glance of the sunshine upon the water, and C—— came up to me with his smiling spirit looking out from his eyes, and I was happy half against my will.—"Happy against his will! Now isn't that nonsense?" I hear A—— exclaim. May she never be able to understand the feelings which she is so apt and so welcome to make merry with! May a perpetual light from within continue to give, as it does now, life, beauty, and newness to every thing about her! I know, as well as she does, that this earth is, properly understood, a place about the surface of which we ought to glide as with wings; that the spirit ought to bear up the body from seeming to touch it; that we ought to pass over it as the bees pass over flowers, only to collect

their sweets: I *know* all this, but I am constantly finding that I *only* know it;—she *feels* it.

Adieu, my dear Claire,

Your affectionate brother,

V. S.

P. S. You will remember that the letters I address to you are intended for all the home circle; and that the wishes and adieus I bid to you are offered for them all.

LETTER III.

Brighton, Monday, Sept. 22, 1817.

It is an instinct of our nature to judge by externals. In the present state of the world I know this instinct is apt sometimes to lead us astray; but it is, upon the whole, a very valuable one; and I generally, to a certain extent, yield myself up to it. I suffer it to influence, but not to fix me.

No one can visit a foreign country with less prejudice against the inhabitants of it than I have against those of England; and yet my first impression is, that I do not like them, and that I never can. You will not, however, do them or me the injustice to take this as a deliberate opinion. It is merely an impulse, arising from the external indications of character which first present themselves to me. There is a hard coarseness of feature, and a repulsive coldness of manner, which, whatever of good or of beauty they may cover, are unequivocally bad in themselves; and these the English appear to me to possess in a remarkable degree.

There is, besides, in all they say and do, an awkward and blundering abruptness, which is peculiarly offensive to a Frenchman. One is accustomed, too, in France, on all occasions, to give and receive a smile at meeting and at parting, even in one's intercourse with strangers. Perhaps these smiles do not mean much; but they are at least harmless. Here I never meet with any thing like a smile, except sometimes an awkward half-suppressed one at my foreign English. This is one of the worst of rudenesses; and one to which the people here are more addicted than to any other: or perhaps it may appear so to me, because it is one which a Frenchman never falls into; though our language possesses such an endless variety of delicacies, which foreigners, and, above all, the English, are perpetually violating. But for the present, I willingly turn from the people to the country.

We are extremely interested by this town. The features of it are not what can be called striking, but they are, I think, very remarkable. There is nothing about it in the slightest degree venerable or impressive, like some of the great French and Flemish towns. There is no beauty or grandeur in the houses or public buildings. On the contrary, there is an air of smallness every where; but this is accompanied by a newness, a completeness, and a

finish, which give to the whole the effect of a picture. Any part that can be taken in by the eye at once, has the appearance of a newly painted scene on the stage. Most of the houses look as if they had been kept in a case, and were now just uncovered for some public occasion. The Prince Regent has lately been staying at a palace he has here; and I inquired whether the houses had been newly beautified on this account, as the people are compelled to do in Spain when the king travels. All the answer I got to the inquiry was a " No, Sir!" accompanied by a rude smile, I suppose at my ignorance in making it.

The houses are mostly built in rows or sets of from ten to twenty, each being a fac-simile of all the rest in the set—or rather, each set looking like one long low house, with a door between every two or three windows. But what seems to me to give the peculiar effect, is the extreme cleanness and newness of every thing. The paint looks as if just laid on—the windows shine like crystal—the stone steps are as white as snow; and, in some parts of the town, the houses are faced with coloured and varnished tiles or bricks, which glitter so when the sun shines, that you cannot look at them steadily.

From what I can judge of the Regent's palace, by seeing it at a distance, it seems to be built in a very strange taste indeed. The most conspicuous

part of it is a large dome, almost as large as that of the Invalids, composed entirely of glass. The palace is nearly surrounded, and all the lower part of it hid, by a range of odd-looking buildings, which are the stables.

There are public libraries where the people meet together in the evening—besides a theatre, assembly-rooms, exhibitions of various kinds, baths, public walks, &c.; all included in a town containing not more than twelve thousand inhabitants. So that, if Brighton may be taken as a fair specimen of an English country town, we must have been strangely misinformed as to the people's love of amusement.

V. S.

LETTER IV.

Brighton, Tuesday, Sept. 23, 1817.

You know part of our plan is never to be in a hurry—never to mistake moving for travelling, or to arrive at a place for no other purpose than to quit it. I was too happy at home to have been induced to leave it in search of mere pleasure—even if pleasure were to be found in the rattle of wheels. I'm certain I shall spend no day so happily while I'm away, as I should have done at V——, with every thing that is dear to me about me. But I hope to return there, less unworthy of the love that will greet me, and capable of loving the givers of it *better* than ever—*more* I cannot. In the meantime I shall continue to fulfil the condition on which we mutually consented to separate: namely, that I should tell you all I see, and think, and feel: in short, that I should *talk* to you as I do when we are sitting together on the terrace, or sauntering under the chestnut trees:—talk, by the

way, which, if you hear with delight, it is because your hearts are the chief listeners to it.

I made an odd mistake in my last about the Regent's palace. I described the stables as the palace, and the palace as the stables. I suppose the architect, or his employers, just at the time of forming the plan, must have been reading the English Rabelais' account of a nation in which horses governed and men served them; and so raised the buildings according to that writer's ideas of the comparative nobility of those two races of animals. I was quite mistaken too, in supposing this to be a fair specimen of an English provincial town. We find it has very peculiar features, and seems extremely well adapted to exhibit the manners, habits, &c. of almost all classes of the people. We shall therefore remain here for a few days.

Fashion, you must know, is as peremptory in her decrees here as she is in France; and as effectually destroys all natural and simple tastes and habits of feeling. But both here and there, in spite of the remonstrances of her votaries, she seems obstinately determined, for her health's sake, to transfer her shrine, during the summer months, to a distance from the great cities and the metropolis. What is to be done in this case? For a person of fashion to vegetate among green fields, trees, flowers,

and running brooks, would, doubtless, be a most lamentable waste of life; but then not to *be* a person of fashion would be still worse. In this dilemma a compromise has been made between inclination and duty. Fashion forbids them to live in London, and habit prevents them from living out of it; so they contrive to live in and out of it at the same time, by establishing on the sea-coast, and in different parts of the island, certain little Londons; of which this at Brighton is said to be the most in favour. I suppose because it is the least of all others like the country. The centre of Paris, with its Thuilleries and Champs Elysées, is a garden of Eden to it. The country, for leagues round, is one uninterrupted range of brown, barren chalk-hills; on which a few lean, dirty-looking sheep tantalize their appetites by nibbling at the dry turf. Nature has, to be sure, scattered a tree here and there, to shew that the want of vegetation is not her fault; and a few spots of land have been cultivated; but I imagine this has been done only to make the rest look more barren (that is to say, more beautiful) by the contrast; as coquettes put black patches on their faces, to make the white and red look more brilliant. Never have our own vine-covered hills and delicious vallies of Languedoc shone out upon my memory in absence with such luxuriance as during the few days I've been here.

But they tell us we must not judge of the face of their island by any thing we see in the near neighbourhood of this town; and have referred us to a spot about two leagues distant, for a most extensive and beautiful view of the adjacent country. We intend going there to-morrow.

Till then adieu.

V. S.

LETTER V.

Brighton, Wednesday, Sept. 24, 1817.

We have just returned from visiting what is called the Devil's Dyke. The view from the top of this singular place has a very peculiar character, and is certainly most beautiful. The road to the spot from whence the view is to be seen is admirably calculated to enhance its beauties by direct and sudden contrast. It lays, at first, through corn-fields; but all the latter part is what they call here Downs: that is, an immense tract of country, undulating on all sides, so that you have nowhere a single receding distance as far as the eye can reach, but several separate distances, each distinctly marked, but more and more faintly as they recede behind each other; and all shifting and varying with the position of the eye, or the rise and fall of the track (for there is no road) over which you are passing. The whole is covered with a short brown turf, and unbroken by a single tree or a single habitation; and, with the exception

of a view of the sea now and then on the left, bounded only by the horizon. The effect of this, beside being exceeding fine in itself, adds greatly to that of the noble prospect, which, at a turn of the hill, bursts upon the eye suddenly and at once.

The character of this view is, in almost every thing, different from those we are accustomed to in France; but if it wants their grandeur and variety, it is still extremely beautiful. The spectator stands on the ridge of a range of Downs, such as I have been describing to you, which seem, as far as the eye can reach on either side, to form an inaccessible barrier to the sea. Smooth brown turf covers their almost perpendicular declivity down to the very foot; and then the country lays before the eye in one immense flat, or plain, which, in the front, stretches out interminably, till the blue distance becomes lost in the blue sky. Nothing can be more luxuriant than the cultivation with which the whole of this plain is covered; and yet it is totally different from any thing I have seen before. That part which lays near enough for the eye to distinguish the detail of it, consists of square patches of from one to three or four arpents,* completely divided from each other by thick hedge-rows. This, together with the wood, which is scattered

* An arpent is about an acre.—Tr.

about in small quantities every where, gives to the scene the appearance of a vast garden—at this season almost of a flower garden, from the endless variety of tints by which the whole is covered. To complete the effect of the picture, narrow roads wind about like the course of a river, and lead to little villages which are seen here and there, with their small, simple-looking church-spires rising out of clumps of trees, which seem to have been planted there not by man but by nature. This appearance, both of the roads and the trees, is almost unknown with us; but is extremely pleasing. Indeed, I'm half-inclined not to confess to you how very much I have been delighted by this view; for, if I have succeeded in giving you any thing like a distinct idea of it, you will see how entirely it differs from our own favourite ones. Here are no forest-crowned mountains rising majestically in the distance; no laughing vallies which seem to exult in their own beauty; no rivers winding and glittering between their banks, till they become lost to the eye, but not to the fancy; no vine-covered hills jutting out in the foreground on either side, round the corners of which the imagination is enticed to stray, and paint for itself pictures even more lovely than the one it leaves. Here every thing is *seen;* but then neither the eye nor the mind has a desire to wander: they feel as if they could rest for

ever on the beautiful creation which seems to lay breathing and basking in the sunshine before them. You know I am accustomed to find or to fancy every where, in external nature, symbols of the mind. Our favourite French landscapes seem, then, like the song of the nightingale, to *talk* of joy: this English one, like the voice of the stock-dove, seems to breathe and to murmur of happiness. The one laughs outwardly, like a bacchante of Titian; the other smiles inwardly, like a Madonna of Corregio.

Adieu, for a day or two.

V. S.

LETTER VI.

Brighton, Saturday, Sept. 27, 1817.

THREE days ago we left our Hotel, and came to stay for a short time at what they call here a Boarding-house. This is a kind of establishment unknown with us; and is, I believe, peculiar to these watering places.* The inmates consist at present of about forty persons of both sexes, and all ages. They are all from the middle classes of society, and live together *en famille*, paying a certain sum per week, for which they are supplied with every thing except wine. The sum is about seventy-five francs; which is moderate compared with the extravagant expence of living in the same style at an Hotel. The party all reside in London, and all come here for the same purpose, viz. *pour s'amuser*; so that the plan of assembling together is not ill chosen: but they do not seem to know how to profit by the facilities it affords them of aiding each other in their pursuits. Indeed, from all I have been able to observe here, (and it appears that there cannot be

* The writer is mistaken in both these particulars.—TR.

a better place to observe on this subject), the English seem, of all people I ever heard tell of, to have the oddest notions concerning pleasure. Their amusement is the most *triste* affair in the world. It is not without deserving it that they have the credit, all over the continent, of being great reasoners: for they reason themselves into their very gaiety, such as it is. It is with them an affair of the head, not of the heart. They are gay as a matter of duty or of choice;—not because they *feel* so. They cannot help seeing that we live in a world filled with beauty;—that we cannot step or look abroad for a moment, unless it be among scenes which we ourselves have created or spoiled, without meeting every where sights and sounds of happiness. They think and ponder upon this,—for thinking seems to be their forte; and they conclude that man too was intended to be happy. Following up this train of reasoning, it leads them to the conviction that they *ought* to be happy, and the determination that they *will* be happy; and then they proceed to be happy accordingly. But it is done with a grave air, and a wise face. You can see that they perform their gaiety not as a matter of sentiment, but of principle: as those people perform their religion who worship a Supreme Being, not because they feel that there *is* one, but because they *conclude* that there must be one.

It is remarkable that, when a trait of character once settles itself upon a people, and becomes national, it seldom changes. Old Froissart, four hundred years ago, noticed that on some great public occasion, (I believe it was the meeting between Henry VIII. and Francis, I.) the English people "*s'amusoient tristement, selon l'usage de leur pays.*"

Adieu, for the present.

V. S.

LETTER VII.

Brighton, Sunday, Sept. 28, 1817.

Perhaps I cannot give you a better idea of the private *amusements* of the English people, than by placing you among them here. I will, therefore, send you a sketch of the life of the inmates of this house for one day; as it will, I find, serve as a counterpart to all the rest. You will recollect, too, that it is a day in the lives of persons who have quitted their homes, families, and occupations, solely in search of pleasure; and that the place I write from is considered the gayest in the island.

The usual hour of rising is about nine. Perhaps an hour or two before this, two or three of the party,—young ladies more new to the place than the rest, and glad of an opportunity of looking about them unchecked by the argus eyes of their mammas or aunts,—will stroll to the sea-shore, and dip their fingers into the water to taste "how salt it is!" or try how near they can put their not very pretty feet to the little waves that come rippling over each other, without being *caught* by them; or

wonder at the ocean, and confess that "it is not near so large as they thought it was!" About nine they return; seldom without trophies of their enterprise,—such as, a "curious" stone with a hole in it, a dry star-fish, or a long wet sea-weed dangling to their fingers' ends. By this time the rest of the company begin to drop in, in parties of three or four, to the public eating-room, where a breakfast is prepared of tea, coffee, eggs, &c. This lasts about an hour; during the course of which each seldom fails to inform all the rest who are within speaking distance, that "its a fine" or "a dull morning;" as if each fancied that all the others wanted the faculty to find it out. This generally forms the sum and substance of the *conversation* during breakfast; after which the females retire. Some of them go to their chambers to read for an hour or two: not, however, the works of any of the authors we are acquainted with in France—such as Milton and Pope, or Steele and Addison, or Richardson and Fielding: these appear to have gone quite out of fashion. Nothing is to be seen but novels, written by no matter who—anybody or nobody—provided they have attractive titles, such as the "Victim of Sentiment," or "the Recluse of the Forest;" or romances in verse, and others in prose, written by a living author named Scott, who has lately become extravagantly popular among them. Others sit

down to a piano there is in the public sitting room, and amuse *themselves* by playing and singing; in both of which accomplishments I have as yet been able to discover nothing remarkable, except a total want of feeling either for their instrument, their music, or their hearers. Others are walking on the sea shore to pick up shells, or, if the weather is favourable, taking a dip in the sea;—for some cannot get leave of their papas to come here, without promising to pay this tax at the shrine of health. For the convenience of bathing they are provided with wooden boxes, which go on wheels, and are drawn a short distance into the water by a horse. From this little moving house they descend down steps; and if they are afraid to go by themselves, they are assisted by women, who attend for the purpose; and sometimes by men.* By the bye, a tolerable specimen of the boasted delicacy of English females! Those who are not occupied in any of these ways, will perhaps be found driving about the town or the neighbourhood, in little wooden machines a foot from the ground, drawn by one or two donkies;—or riding upon the backs of those animals, attended by a little boy behind to flog them on—I mean the

* I believe the writer has been misinformed on this point, with respect to Brighton, at least. In several other parts of the country it is not uncommon.—TR.

donkies. I suppose you are putting on an incredulous smile at all this; but it is literally true, I assure you. During this time the men are employed in reading the newspapers, or playing at billiards, (which they have no notion of) or sailing out in a filthy fishing-boat and coming back sick;—or such as keep horses ride up to the Downs, where they exhibit their boasted skill in horsemanship, by trying who can gallop fastest, or leap in the best style over a ditch a yard wide, or a hedge a foot high! All this fills up the time till about three; when they return and dress for dinner, which takes place about half-past four. This is the only meal at which the English eat;—and the wonder is that, with their execrable cooking, they can eat at all. The whole is put on the table at once, except the pastry, which they never dine without. The cloth is then removed, and the wine and dessert put on the bare table. They take scarcely any wine with their dinner; and the females all leave the room a short time after it is over. The men remain about an hour; when most of the party assemble in the drawing-room, and the mistress of the house prepares tea. During this operation some of the men amuse themselves by talking what I suppose they call gallantry, to the ladies; to which the latter appear to listen with exemplary patience. But, generally speaking, the men—and particularly the young

ones—crowd together in one corner of the room, and recount the adventures of the day; embellishing the relation every now and then by a loud general laugh, which, for any thing the rest of the company know to the contrary, may be directed at them. It is by this time eight o'clock. Most of the party now go to a public walk, where all the visitors of the town assemble. Their evident objects in this are, to see and be seen; but, as you'll perceive from the time (eight o'clock in September), they contrive that it shall be exactly too late for either of these purposes. This, however, they don't seem to be aware of, but very innocently walk backwards and forwards for an hour in the dark, and then go to one or other of the public libraries. You'll think these odd places for ladies to go, in search of amusement, and at this time of night; but you must not judge of things here by their names. A library means any thing rather than what it does with us. Imagine to yourself a large long room, on one side of which, from top to bottom, are shelves for books; the opposite side forming a window looking to the public walk, and filled with music, toys, gloves, perfumery, and a thousand et ceteras; and a counter running along the whole length on one side, covered with glass-cases containing jewellery, &c. At one end, elevated on a little stage about two feet from the ground, sit two persons, who are constantly play-

ing, or rather working, country dances, on a harp and a piano; except when they are relieved, at the expence of the company, by a third person, who sings a song. At the opposite ends are placed forms and chairs, on which the females sit. In the middle is a table at which a man stands, (I suppose one of the *librarians*) with a pack of cards in his hand, which he occasionally turns up, and cries out the numbers to which each card has a reference in some sort of petty gambling, the mysteries of which we have not yet discovered. Imagine all the interstices of this space completely jammed up with tolerably well-dressed people of all ages, sexes and conditions, (for there is no exclusion, and nothing to pay for coming in,) and you'll have as good an idea as I can give you of a Public Library at Brighton. "But for what do they assemble here?" you'll ask. It's what I have asked twenty times; but they smile, and look foolish, and can't tell me. To return to our party: those who do not spend their evening in wandering about to one or other of these Libraries (for there are three), have perhaps been sitting at home at a green table, with their eyes fixed on certain papers covered with black and red spots—their brows contracted into a wise frown—their minds on the stretch, and their mouths closed in a profound silence for three hours—only occasionally

interrupted by mutual recriminations, provided they happen to be good friends enough to be warranted in abusing each other;—and this they call *playing* at whist! About half-past ten they drop in, to a cold supper; and by about half-past eleven the whole of the party have generally retired to bed, to dream of the pleasures of the past day, or anticipate those of to-morrow: which they may do with great safety, for they are pretty sure to resemble in all respects those of yesterday.

You will observe that I have not mentioned the Theatre among the amusements of the evening; and in fact it very seldom is so. If a person of quality condescends to patronize the performances, their name is put at the head of the bills; and then every body goes, whatever the performance may be: but the merits of the play, or the talents of the actors, have seldom sufficient attraction for any but a few of the town's-people.

From all this—than which it is not easy to conceive any thing more *ennuyeuse*, except writing the account of it, and, as I'm afraid you'll find, the reading it,—you'll conclude that the English have strange notions of gaiety and amusement. In fact they have none at all. A single sunshiny fête day at St. Cloud—with the booths, the games and the water-works; the children sporting about every where—the young men and maids wander-

ing in pairs among the trees—the middle-aged and old occupying the walks, or seated in groups on chairs, quietly enjoying the happiness that breathes, looks, and speaks in every thing about them; and, above all, the finish of the whole by the music and dancing at night: a single day such as this, embodies more real pleasure—calls forth more heart—cherishes more complacent feelings towards our fellow-beings—tends more to invigorate and fit the mind for the duties of daily life—in short, fulfils to more effect the end for which we live in this beautiful world, than all the gloomy gaiety that such a place as this produces in an age—Sundays included: of which last I shall have more to tell you hereafter.

You'll easily believe there's nothing to keep us here any longer. We shall complete our week at the boarding-house, and then set off for London. You must not expect to hear of us again till we arrive there.

Adieu.

V. S.

LETTER VIII.

London, Thursday, October 2, 1817.

We left Brighton on the 30th, slept that night at a town called Dorking, and arrived in London yesterday afternoon. This is not the shortest road; but we chose it because we were told the country through which it lies is the more beautiful of the two: and we were indeed delighted with it the whole way. It is in one respect different from what we had been led to expect by the flatness of the view from the Devil's Dyke,—being a succession of hill and dale throughout: but for the rest, it in every thing resembles that.

In travelling here, you need never be reminded of towns and cities till you come to them. The roads are mostly enclosed by thick hedge-rows on either side, with lofty trees growing out of them at intervals; and they wind about so that you can scarcely ever see along them for two hundred yards; but from the elevations and openings in the trees, you catch every now and then beautiful

views, which are perpetually varying in extent and character, but which never become strikingly grand. Every thing, indeed, is on a smaller scale than what I have been accustomed to see. I feel as if I had got upon the surface of a smaller globe than that on which France is situated. Even the houses are in keeping with this feeling. The country seats of the nobility and gentry are, in point of size, like baby-houses, compared with those of France. Indeed, I can in no way bring to my own mind so striking a feeling of the contrast in this respect, as by fancying a French chateau placed on any one spot in the road between Brighton and London.

As far as I have seen, the characteristic of English scenery is exactly this; that the unity of feeling, connected with what is called *the country*, is never broken. The hand of man may be detected every where, but it nowhere obtrudes itself; for the work is done in the very spirit of nature. There are no endless avenues of trees—no boundless fields of corn—no strait, wide, paved roads—no woods planted in lines and sections, with the branches of the trees stripped off to the top. These have certainly a grand and imposing effect; but like most other grand and imposing things, they talk of what one does not desire to hear. Such an avenue of trees *must* be the approach to some

grand house; such an immense tract of corn must belong to some wealthy proprietor; such a broad road must lead to some great city; such a wood must have been planted for some use: now grand houses, wealthy proprietors, large cities, and utility, are the most unrural things in the world; they are precisely what one goes into the country to forget.

I have constantly had feelings allied to these, when I have been travelling in France; but they were never very definite ones. I knew there was something I disliked in the scenery, but I could not tell exactly what. I now at once perceive the cause of this; and if I had learned nothing else, *that* alone would have been worth coming for.

You know I am not one of those querulous persons who want every thing just as it cannot be had; though I used to lament that, where cultivation was required, the hand of the cultivator must necessarily be so visible: but I now find here, that it need be visible only in strict keeping with the scene of it.

Unity of effect is the great source of beauty in all nature, and in all art. To speak of French and English scenery as matters of taste, and leaving particular associations out of the question, the difference between them seems to be, that, in the French, this unity of effect is perpetually

broken, by the evident desire to blend, in the mind of the spectator, admiration of art with that of nature; in the English it is perpetually preserved, by keeping art out of sight. An Englishman seems content to love nature for herself. A Frenchman can love nature too: but his admiration of her increases in proportion as she calls up feelings connected with *himself*—just as he loves his wife or his mistress best when she happens to have on a dress that *he* chose for her.

Would it be too fanciful, to trace the character of national scenery to that of the people to which it belongs? The crying fault of the French character is egotism, arising from open self-satisfaction; that of the English, is gloom, arising from secret self-discontent. A Frenchman cannot have too much of himself: an Englishman cannot have too little. A Frenchman constantly feels himself to be a part of his country, and his country to be a part of himself; so that he never cares to quit it: an Englishman feels that he *has* a country only from the particular ties that bind him to it; so that when *they* are broken, the world becomes his country, and he wanders from one part of it to another, without end or aim. It cannot be denied that both these are very faulty extremes in character; but I think of the two, the English one is likely to produce, upon the whole, the least perni-

cious effects. Indeed, it may lead to good ones; but the other cannot. That which makes us content with the thing we are, and with all that is about us, binds us to earthly and tangible reality, with a chain that is the more strong from its being invisible, and from our having no desire to break it. It keeps the mind in perpetual subjection; checks the growth of all its faculties, except the very worst; and in the end, inevitably destroys the very best. But that which induces us to fly from ourselves, though it often leads to more fatal consequences than the other, may have a contrary effect. The human mind cannot exist without love and admiration; they are its daily food; food that is scattered about for it every where. It is true that, when the mental appetite becomes vitiated, and cannot relish what it finds strewed about its feet, it *may* starve; but on the other hand, it may be driven to seek its food at a distance. Hatred of itself, and of humanity, may force it to seek refuge in other worlds—in the world of books—the world of thought—the world of nature; and, let it but once gain a true insight of these, and all its finer faculties must expand. Its fancy and imagination, which are always progressive, and yet always young, will then travel through all the regions of possible or impossible existence; and if they return without finding a

dwelling-place, they will yet bring back with them stores, from which they may for ever after create worlds of their own. The affections, too, will then recognise their kindred with humanity; they will learn the true objects on which they were made to rest; and will find, that, if they can for awhile expatiate in external nature, as in their *country*, they can, after all, have no *home* but in the human heart. The mind's vitiated appetite will then be corrected; its taste for the simple and true will revive; and all will be right again.

I have been led a long way from where I intended to have gone. I merely meant to ask whether the different characters of which I have spoken, in the scenery of the two countries, may not be traced to these different *traits* in those of the people? Whether the Frenchman, being always contented with himself, and wherever he may wander, desiring to find hints that may bring him back to himself, may not therefore have endeavoured to put upon every thing external an impress of himself? And, whether the Englishman, being never really contented with himself, and always desiring to take refuge in something else, finding external nature the best strong hold to which he can retreat from himself, may not therefore have endeavoured to leave or to keep it as he found it?

After all, however, the approach to the metropolis, and the view of it just before entering, if not the most pleasing, is by far the most remarkable part of the journey. For more than two leagues before entering London, the road is lined on each side, almost without intermission, with houses; all of which, for cleanness and finish, may be described by what I told you of those at Brighton. But the view of the metropolis itself, at about a league distance—or rather the spot which it occupies—is the most singular sight I ever beheld. I really at the first view of it felt quite a shock, at the idea of living in such a place. All that can be seen of the city itself is the immense dome of its cathedral; the rest, apparently for leagues on every side, is one dead immoveable mass of thick dun-yellow smoke, not hanging over, but rising out of it, and more and more dense as it approaches the earth; so that the thickest part must be that which the inhabitants breathe.

However, on coming a little closer, it did not seem quite so bad; so we ventured into it, and here we are, very well accommodated at the hotel C——'s friend recommended to us. C—— wrote to tell him of our arrival, and he came to us directly. I thought there was, at first, a little hardness and reserve of manner about him; but this soon wore off, and I think I shall be pleased

with him. We intend staying here a few days, and shall then perhaps accept the invitation he has given us to pass some time at his house.

In two or three days I shall tell you something of this very strange place :—more than commonly strange to me perhaps, from my having had so little to do with great cities of late.

V. S.

LETTER IX.

London, Saturday, Oct. 4, 1817.

We don't intend going to any of the sights of London till we have M—— with us; so I've been wandering about, for the last two days, without any distinct object. In one word, I hate London already! The filth of the streets, and the eternal din of the carts and coaches in them, are execrable;—the general aspect of the people you meet there—hard, heavy, coarse, vulgar, awkward—the antithesis of every thing *spirituel*—is execrable; their ungraceful and tasteless costume is execrable; the endless succession of plain brown dirty-looking bricks piled up for houses, with plain square holes for windows and doors, are execrable;—to me—who loathe commerce in its beginning and its end, its objects and its effects—the shops, superb as some of them are, are execrable; and above all, the atmosphere (for London has one of its own) is execrable.

Let me again warn you that these are only first impressions, not deliberate opinions; not what I

think, but what I feel. I can at once perceive, however, that London contains all the horrors of Paris, without any of its general character of external grandeur. It remains for me to learn whether any thing like the particular splendors of Paris are to be found here;—its magnificent public Monuments, its admirable Museums of Art and Nature, its truly royal Library, its Palaces and Temples, its Lyceums and Academies, its Theatres, Gardens and Fountains, and the rest of those virtues of that first of cities, which half contrive, even among the wise and good, to keep its vices in countenance.

Monday, Oct. 6, ——

I CONTINUE this from the house of M———. You may be sure I satisfied myself of the sincerity of his wish that we should make his house our home while we remain in London, before I consented to accept the invitation.

There is something very peculiar about this young Englishman. Over his countenance there is a hue of deep, settled thoughtfulness, which is very remarkable in so young a man; and there is something about his manner, which at the same time

represses confidence and encourages it; a reserve which forbids a quick intimacy, or sudden interchange of thoughts and feelings, and yet a sincerity of expression which cannot be mistaken; which at once satisfies you that he must mean what he says; a sincerity that will not even permit itself those allowable exaggerations upon which all conventional politeness is founded. I am certain, for example, that nothing would induce him to offer his hand, or subscribe himself, "sincerely yours," to a man he despised. He has a tinge of the melancholy which is said to be so prevalent among the English; but instead of settling, as it usually does, into a coarse and careless indifference, it seems in him to have assumed a directly opposite feature. It seems to have elevated his character, instead of depressing it—to have strengthened his mind, instead of weakening it—to have softened his heart, instead of indurating it. This melancholy may be detected in every thing; in his countenance, his voice, his manner of speaking, thinking and feeling; but it never becomes obtrusive in any thing. Perhaps, indeed, it may require something of a kindred feeling to detect it at all; for C—— scarcely observed it, though he had opportunities, when M—— was in France last year, of seeing a good deal of him. But C—— saw enough then to make him sure

that M—— and I should like each other very much; and I think we shall.

I can perceive that M—— dislikes talking, except on a few particular subjects; but on them he speaks with that fine and somewhat exaggerating earnestness, which always springs from real and intense feeling, and can spring from nothing else. The favorite of these subjects seem to be poetry, the fine arts, and elegant literature in general. In the two last of these we seem to agree in almost every thing; but with respect to poetry, I don't think we exactly understand each other yet.

To-morrow we go to see the fragments of ancient architectural sculpture, that were brought from Greece some years ago. They are chiefly from the Parthenon; so that you'll readily guess I have chosen to see *them* before any thing else.

The more I see of this vast city—(it is nearly twice as large as Paris—) the less I like it. I shall therefore change my plan of telling you all I think of every thing. To be perpetually dwelling on what displeases me, would, I'm sure, gratify you as little as it would me; and by speaking only of the few fine things that are here, I shall be able to tell you the more about *them*: for, since I have found so much to love in the world, I have endeavoured to habituate my mind and senses to

employ themselves about nothing else;—to have no eyes but for beauty—no ears but for music—no thoughts but for pleasantness;—to admit no memory but of joy—no forethought but of hope. "But is this a possible state to arrive at?" you ask. I suppose not:—but that should not deter us from striving after it.

LETTER X.

London, Tuesday, Oct. 7, 1817.

I HAVE seen the sculptures from the Parthenon; and though I intended that my account of every thing connected with the arts in this country, should be reserved till I had qualified myself to form a judgment as to their general condition, yet I cannot resist the impulse of writing to you a few words about these glorious works, now that the feelings they have excited in me are at their height. I shall be able to give you a more detailed account of them hereafter, when I come to speak of the National Museum, of which they form so distinguished a part.

You may thank your stars, as I do mine, that I am not a critic—that I can't talk about these things technically. If I could, I should never have done. But then I should *only* talk about, not admire them; as it is, I can only admire, not talk about them. It is not possible for me to convey to you what I think, or rather what I feel about them, because

I have nothing but *words* to send you; and they, unaccompanied by expression of voice and look, are comparatively powerless. In short, these exquisite fragments—for they are mere fragments—are worthy to stand beside the Venus itself. Like that statue, they are pure imitations of select nature; and so far perhaps, they rank above the Apollo, as it respects the artists who formed them. I mean that more intense study, a profounder knowledge of art, and a deeper feeling for beauty as it exists in nature, were probably required, to produce these works, than the Apollo. But I think that, without reference to the skill which produced them, and viewed only as things calculated to induce certain permanent effects on the mind and heart of the spectator, that sublime statue ranks above them. One, capable of appreciating them justly, may pass a day among these sculptures from the Parthenon, and leave them with no other feelings than those of present and immediate delight and admiration: but he cannot stand for an hour before the Apollo, without becoming wiser, better, and happier, for the rest of his life. I do not mean that the Apollo has more of what is called *ideal beauty*; but that it has something superior to beauty at all: something loftier—more imaginative—more unearthly.

This term "ideal beauty" is perpetually in the

mouths of the critics here and every where else; and yet they are all puzzled themselves, and they puzzle every body else, in determining what it means. Well they may; for in fact it means nothing at all. It is a contradiction in terms. It is intended to mark a distinction, which they fancy is to be discovered, between the beauty of art and the beauty of nature. But there is no such distinction. There can be none. Every thing that is beautiful in art is to be found somewhere in nature, in at least an equal, I think a superior degree. I am persuaded, for example, that there is nothing in art equal to some human faces which I myself have seen. But then there is, perhaps, nothing in nature equal to some works of art, as combinations of beauty; and this is all that can be meant, or at least that ought to be meant, by ideal beauty. It is *select* beauty, and nothing more. It must have its various prototypes somewhere in nature, or it is not beauty at all.

I do not think the Greeks had any notion of ideal beauty, as distinguished from real or natural. They selected from nature, and then created from their selections: witness the Helen of Zeuxis. But they did not attempt to engender an artificial beauty in their own minds; because they knew that the imagination itself, with all its wondrous powers, cannot create any thing permanently

affecting to the human mind, the rudiments of which did not previously exist somewhere in nature. The Venus is the most perfect statue in existence, not because it possesses a beauty superior to, or different from, that of nature, but because it combines the largest portion of select natural beauty; and this beauty can be considered as ideal, only so far as it is not a *portrait*—not a copy from, but an imitation of, nature. A portrait can, perhaps, never be perfect, except *as* a portrait. It may be said that nothing in art which *is* a copy, or *is not* an imitation, of nature, can be perfect. And admitting the first part of this axiom to be true, the works of nature are not therefore imperfect; for all the rudiments of perfection exist in her; and she has given to man the mechanical power to combine them, and the mental power to appreciate them when they are combined.

I have been led to make these remarks, by reading the opinions of the professional critics here, on the marbles from Athens.* They all seem to agree that the fragments possess less of what they call ideal beauty than the Apollo does.

* The writer seems to refer to the Report of the Committee of the House of Commons on the subject of purchasing these marbles for the national museum.—Tr.

But some rank them exactly as much below that statue as others do above it : and what is very singular, precisely for the *same reason*—namely, *because* they possess less ideal beauty. This incongruity arises from neither party having distinct notions of what they themselves mean by ideal beauty. One party has right feelings on the subject, but both have wrong principles.

It is remarkable, too, that these critics seem to have forgotten that the Venus de Medici exists at all. Not one of them, in making comparisons between these sculptures, and other fine things of the kind, has mentioned that divine statue,—to which, of all others, these bear the nearest resemblance, in point of style and character.

By the bye, one of these persons (and one whose works, as an artist, have acquired him a very just celebrity, on the Continent as well as here,) has made the notable discovery, that the Apollo is only a copy! The arrangement of the hair, he says, and the folds of the mantle, are more adapted to bronze than to marble! Indeed! And could this person really dare to stand in that awful presence, and, instead of bowing down before the visible God, suffer his eyes to go peeping and prying about among the plaits of the hair and the folds of the mantle? But this it is to be a professional cri-

tic—to look technically at things! He reminded me of two of his countrywomen whom I once saw standing before the Transfiguration. I found that the whole of their attention had been fixed by the plaiting of the hair of one of the female figures. It was "so natural," they said. You see the extremes of knowledge and of ignorance exactly meet. I dare say this gentleman is one of those who occasionally employ themselves in pulling a rose to pieces scientifically, in order to see how it is made.

I have no great affection for the "*triste métier de critique*" at any time; but least of all when it is employed about the highest productions of the fine arts—such as the sculptures in question. They are, in fact, not subjects for criticism at all. They are above its sphere. It is the general feeling of mankind—the light that is within us, that must appreciate *them*. That which contains no beauty but what it requires the eye of a critic to find out, contains none at all. All the criticism in the world never made a single real lover of the fine arts. It has made hosts of amateurs and connoisseurs—worshippers of a name—stringers of phrases—chatterers about *gusto*, *chiaro-scuro*, the *beau idéal*, and so forth. But these have no real love for the fine arts. They can have none; because real love,

whatever may be the objects of it, springs from the depths of the heart; and these people *have* no hearts; they have talked theirs away, or bartered them for a vocabulary of technical phrases.

When once the few fundamental principles of art are known, then the taste that is got by reading books of criticism, is like the morality that is acquired by reading books of casuistry; namely, something worse than none at all: for criticism is to beauty in art, just what metaphysics is to truth in morals—it makes "no light, but rather darkness visible." Criticism, like every thing else, is very well in its place; but, like every thing else, it does not exactly know where that is. The sublimities of M. Angelo are beyond its reach; the divine forms of Raphael were not made to be meddled with by its unhallowed fingers; the ineffable expressions of Correggio must not be sullied by its earthly breath: they were given to the world for something better; and they have done their bidding hitherto, and will do it to the end of time. They have opened a perpetual spring of lofty thoughts and pure meditations; they have blended themselves with the very existence, and become a living principle in the heart of mankind: and they are now no more fit to be touched and tampered with than the stars of heaven; for like them "*levan di terra al cielo nostr' intelletto.*"

When I recollect that all the choicest of these treasures were lately ours, and that now they are gone from us for ever, I cannot help for a moment turning my thoughts to where, of all other places, they are least at ease,—among cabinets and statesmen. I cannot help asking, After all that we had suffered, was this necessary? Was it just?—But my melancholy feelings are doubled at these questions, for I dare not answer them in the negative.

I must indulge myself, for a moment, in following these holy relics (the only things which deserve that title) to what, after all, seems to be their destined home; in fancying the pure and solemn delight of some noble spirit, (for there are still a few who dignify that deservedly unhappy country) on hearing of their return. He would at first, perhaps, like Petrarch when he thought he discovered a gleam of hope dawning on the liberties of his country, fancy he heard the united spirit of the mighty dead—

> "Si faccia lieto, udenda la novella;
> Edice, Roma mia sarà ancor bella."

But if he appreciate these things justly, his joy will not be unmixed with melancholy; for he will feel that Italy is not now a worthy sanctuary for them; though he may still hope that by and

through them she may become so. He will not dare to think upon the present; for if he did, it could only be to ask, with one of her own children,

> "Italia! che suoi guai non par che senta;
> Vecchia, oziosa, e lenta;
> Dormirà sempre?"

Or to exclaim with another, still more indignantly,

> "Or va: repudia il valor prisco, e sposa
> L'ozio, e fra il sangue, i gemiti, e le strida,
> Nel periglio maggior dormi, e riposa:
> Dormi, adultera vil."

In short, in whatever way he may connect his thoughts with these deathless memorials of the glory of his country and of human nature, all his conscious elevation at the sight of them must spring from the past, all his hopes and aspirations must rest upon the future.

V. S.

LETTER XI.

London, Wednesday, Oct. 8th, 1817.

I HAVE just come from seeing St. Paul's Cathedral. I had been reading something about it last night, and this morning I by accident found myself on the bridge of Blackfriars, from which, as I've learned since, there is the best view of it that can be had any where; though even from that point it is seen to great disadvantage, as the whole of its lower order is concealed by the surrounding buildings. I have not, of late, been very apt to be surprised; but I was so, and to a very fine effect, by the first unexpected view of this most stupendous temple. I had passed half over the bridge before I saw the Cathedral, or knew that it was in sight; but turning on the left hand to look at the scenery on the banks of the Thames, it stood before me with a look of grandeur and beauty of which I had formed no previous idea. After having passed all the rest of the day in examining it from every point

of view, I do not hesitate to tell you that, as a whole which can be taken in by the eye at once, I think the Cathedral of the City of London must be the finest thing in the world! Perhaps the finest that ever has been in the world. In saying this, I do not forget that the Parthenon once existed, and that St. Peter's still does exist.

Though I would not venture to decide, even for myself, without seeing St. Peter's, yet I am disposed to rank the Cathedral of London before it; for it is quite possible to carry mere *size* too far—and I think this must have been done in St. Peter's. It must be too large for all its parts to conduce to one general effect.

With respect to the Parthenon, I should think that for beauty—pure, chaste, affecting beauty—arising from the entire symmetry, consistency, and simplicity of all its parts, and the marvellous skill and character of its sculptural ornaments, that temple must have been the most perfect work that was ever produced by the hand of man. But that beauty was to be attributed chiefly to its comparative smallness,—which justified the architect in bestowing so much labour on the details, because it enabled the spectator to appreciate them; and also to the simplicity of its form,—which, from any one point of view, produced all its effects immediately, and at once. But then the inferior size of the

Parthenon, and the extreme simplicity of its form, prevented it from producing those elevated and elevating feelings, which are the grandest achievements of works of art; and which are (at least in architecture) the result of vastness of size, and variety and consistency of parts, so combined as to produce unity of effect.

The praisers of the Parthenon overlay it with all kinds of incongruous epithets. They call it sublime, and beautiful, and awful, and I know not what besides; as if it were possible for all these attributes to belong to any one thing at one and the same time! The truth is, the Parthenon was beautiful; beautiful even to absolute perfection; but nothing else. Or, if it might be said to have a character of majesty, it was that majesty which accompanies perfect beauty —precisely the majesty of a beautiful human face. I will venture to compare the Parthenon to the Venus, and St. Paul's to the Apollo. If I am entitled to judge of the Parthenon, merely from an acquaintance with its architectural parts through the medium of descriptions and engravings, and from seeing the fragments which exist of its sculptural ornaments, I should think the effect produced by it as a whole must have been precisely of the same character with that produced by the Venus; a feeling, in which art, *as art*, has no connection whatever. In that work, art has reached that con-

summate point of perfection, that acme, at which it ceases *to be* art, and becomes nature. We do not *admire* the Venus. We do not think of it as a work of art, any more than we think of a beautiful human form as a work of art. It stands before us in all the shrinking loveliness of a living woman—in all the breathing beauty of a glorious human creature. We love it with the real affections that belong to flesh and blood, because it never carries us beyond ourselves—because we perpetually feel a kindred with it. The Venus is one among the examples which prove that nature triumphs every where; even in the very centre of the domains of art itself. The Parthenon is another of these examples. What I mean by saying, that in these two works nature has triumphed in the midst of art, is, that the real admirers of them would never, for an instant, cease gazing at their beauty, in order to exclaim on the wondrous skill which produced it; because it is the beauty of nature which they are admiring, not of art.

I'm wandering as usual; but you know how apt one fine thing is to lead me among the images of a host of others. Five minutes ago I was in modern London; and now I have been luxuriating in ancient Athens, till I hardly know my way back again.

St. Paul's, I repeat, is, perhaps, a finer work, with reference to itself, than the Parthenon was.

The effects resulting from the contemplation of the modern building are certainly less difficult to produce than those from the ancient one; but when produced they are more valuable. I should think the Parthenon was looked at with one single feeling of intense, but tranquil pleasure—a full, total, unmixed delight. St. Paul's calls up feelings of a more elevated, a more impressive, and a more lasting character. Those feelings vary from time to time as you continue looking, till at last they resolve themselves into a lofty but indefinite admiration, which lifts you above yourself, and the earth, and the things of it, and inspires you with a moral assurance of the possibility of something infinitely greater, better, and happier. It is with reference to its power of suggesting such feelings as these, that I have ventured to compare St. Paul's to the Apollo. But let it not be overlooked, that in standing before St. Paul's and the Apollo, we never *forget* that they are works of art; while in gazing on the Parthenon and the Venus we never *remember* it: and this alone, with reference to the skill of the artists who produced them, places the latter in a higher class of art than that of the former.

You see I cannot help sometimes speaking and thinking of the Parthenon, as if it still existed. In fact it has so long been the favorite image of my

contemplation among works of art, and I have taken such pains, or rather pleasure, in making myself acquainted with all its parts, separate and together, that I can now, without any difficulty, call it up before me as it stood before Pericles three-and-twenty centuries ago, in all its matchless beauty.

I cannot help being amused at fancying what the Londoners would say to my praises of their cathedral. I am sure they would *think* them quite extravagant, if they did not say so. They do not seem to have an idea even of its comparative size. I dare say, not ten among the tens of thousands who pass by it every day, have ever looked at it at all;—and those who have, seem to want either taste to perceive its beauties, or enthusiasm to admire them. They go to Paris and stare at every thing in stupid wonder, and then come back and pass by their own magnificent cathedral, without seeming to know it stands there; though Paris contains nothing of the same kind that can approach to a comparison with it. There is, to be sure, one excuse for this: St Paul's is so hideously clogged up on all sides with houses, that it may be passed by without being observed, if it is not looked for. It would certainly be worth while to establish a despotic monarchy in this country for one twelvemonth, if one could be sure

the holder of it would have taste enough to employ part of the time in battering down all the buildings that stand within a few hundred yards of St. Paul's on every side. I cannot think of any mischief he would be able to do in the rest of the time, for which this would not compensate.

Adieu.

V. S.

LETTER XII.

London, Oct. 11th, 1817.

You'll say it was not without reason that I warned you not to pay too much attention to my first impressions. Indeed, first impressions are valuable only when they are duly appreciated *as such*. I told you that I hated London; and afterwards, that the more I saw of it, the more I hated it. But now that I have seen still more of it, I begin to think it a very fine place. I believe, after all, the only way to judge, or to communicate our judgment properly, on any subject, is, to put down our impressions about it, exactly in the order and degree in which they occur; and then to balance and decide on those impressions:—not to suffer the various and contending feelings, that we experience on almost every subject, to arrange and amalgamate *themselves* (as they inevitably will do, if left to themselves) into a crude and shapeless mass, which can never afterwards be separated, or

applied to any good purpose, either for ourselves or others.

I have now seen enough of London to be able to give you my impressions about it as a whole; but I find that, from the necessarily indistinct nature of those impressions, I can only give them to you negatively, or by comparison. The general aspect, then, of London, is quite inferior to that of Paris. London has all the faults of great cities, in a greater degree, perhaps, than any other; and yet it seems to me to want almost all their redeeming virtues. There is no grandeur of effect arising from any one part of it; because, from its immense extent, and from the purely accidental nature of the circumstances which have given rise to the different arrangements of it, there is no consistency, completeness, or totality of effect any where; and because the public buildings are so scattered about as to lose all power of producing an impression, except one by one. And then London is neither old enough nor young enough to excite any interest on either of these accounts. It has none of the venerableness of antiquity, and none of the splendor of newness; none of the wild interest of a half civilized city, and none of the beautiful uniformity of an over civilized one. There are no parts of it that rest upon and recur to the memory spontaneously, such as the Boulevards, the Quay

des Thuilleries, or the Place de Louis XV. at Paris. In short, London, unlike most other great cities, cannot be described so as to produce any distinct idea of it. Rousseau might have said, its characteristic is that it has no characteristic at all.

Yet, notwithstanding all this, London contains in detail, much to interest and be admired. I have passed the last few days in wandering about in the vicinity of the parks, and in that part in which are situated the town residences of the nobility and persons not connected with commerce. The parks are most delightful places, quite unlike any thing elsewhere. They are large open spaces several miles in circumference, covered with turf, and ornamented with plantations, sheets of water, inclosures containing deer, cattle, &c. and are intersected by roads and walks in all directions. It is in one of these parks that all the fashionables of London meet before dinner every Sunday, during the greater part of the year. On a fine day the throng of carriages is so great, and the mode of their entering and going out is so badly arranged, that they are frequently locked together for an hour or two without moving. The horsemen ride in and out between the wheels of the carriages with great dexterity, and in a way that would quite astonish a Parisian promenadeur in

the Bois de Boulogne. But the parks can scarcely be considered as parts of London, though they are situated in, and enclosed by it, on all sides. They are like spots of land lying in the centre of the domain of an all-grasping proprietor, but which he has not yet been able to place his hands upon; and I dare say the Londoners think them blemishes accordingly.

The squares, which are chiefly situated at this end of the town, are much the finest parts of London. They are large ranges of buildings, with open spaces in the centre, like the Place Vendome. They are either circular or square—but are called squares, whatever their form may be. The spaces in the middle are laid out as gardens, with pieces of water, statues of celebrated men, &c. The want of uniformity in the plans of the houses, and the bare and quaker-like simplicity of English domestic architecture, destroy all the grandeur of effect which might be made to result from this mode of building; but yet these squares are greatly superior to any thing else of the kind, that I have seen in great cities. I am told that London contains not less than three or four and twenty of these squares; none of which are smaller than the Place Vendome, and many are nearly as large as the Place de Louis XV. One of the largest and finest of these is Grosvenor-square. The centre is

occupied by gardens, which are laid out with an eye to uniformity, and at the same time to the concealment of it; they consist of turf, planted with trees, and shrubs, and intersected by gravel-walks, and parterres of flowers: the whole is enclosed by handsome iron rails. No one has access to these gardens but the inhabitants of each square respectively; and you never see any one walking in them but nursery maids with children. Immediately outside the iron-railing there is a wide paved carriage-way; beyond that a foot path of smooth flat stones; and then the houses. Of the ranges of houses which form the extremity of the square, it is singular that there are not two alike. You may easily guess the strange effect of this, in so large a range of buildings. Some are of stone, and others stuccoed; but the chief part are of different coloured bricks; and the style of architecture is different in them all—or rather there is no style at all in any. There is no uniformity even in their heights; which produces a worse effect than any thing else. They are all very low, most of them having only two stories, and none more than three.

In trying to discover whether any good can be imagined to result from this irregular style of building, I have found, or fancied, that each

particular house, being thus marked and distinguished from its neighbour, suggests the idea of *property* much more readily than it would do if all were alike. And this feeling is no unimportant one in the consideration of an Englishman;—so that it is probable the sum of pleasure gained by the owner of each house being able to think of, and recognize it as *his own*, is greater than would result from the admiration of strangers, if the various buildings had formed one grand and uniform whole. And this feeling is never disturbed by two or more families residing in one house—at least in this part of the town. Where lodgings are to be let, it is generally in a row of small houses which are all alike, and not one of which, perhaps, actually belongs to the inhabitant of it, but the whole of them to some one person, who has probably called the street or place by his own name. There is no country in the world, where the feeling of *property* is so restless and intense as it is in England. Those who have money here, generally embark it in something that they can set their mark upon—that they may look at it, and call it their own. An Englishman does not seem to be sure that his house will not be claimed by some one else, unless he makes it unlike all others, and puts his name upon it; he cannot be

certain that his little plot of land will not escape from under his feet, until he has hemmed it in by a high paling, or a thick impenetrable hedge.

In my next I shall tell you something of the most remarkable public buildings; and in the order, or rather the disorder, in which they occur in my walks and in my note book.

V. S.

LETTER XIII.

London, October 12th, 1817.

The most *remarkable* public buildings in London are certainly the Royal Palaces. Nothing can give one a more striking idea of the comparatively little respect in which Kings are held in this country, than the external aspect of their residences; and they shew, also, the state of total barbarism in which the arts remained in England, at a period when they had reached the highest point of perfection they have hitherto arrived at in other countries, her immediate neighbours.

The best and handsomest of the town palaces is Buckingham-house; and this would hardly serve for the residence of a wealthy private gentleman in France. Think of the monarch of a great nation having for his town palace, a brick house two stories high, with four pilasters stuck in the front of it, and nine windows on a floor! Yet, such is Buckingham-house, situated in one of the Parks. To be sure it was not intended for a

royal palace; but was built by a nobleman—the Duke of Buckingham. But this you will think does not mend the matter.—There are two other palaces, which are of brick also. They are even inferior to the one I have described; and are remarkable only for that perverse skill which could contrive to put together such a mass of materials, without, by any accident, or in any particular, making an approach to either grandeur or beauty.

Carlton-house, the present town residence of the Regent, but which was erected expressly for him as heir-apparent to the throne, is in much better style. It is built of stone, and though extremely small, is in very good taste. It has a highly ornamented Corinthian portico, which, combining and yet contrasting with the simple style of the wings of the building, gives an elegant and somewhat classical air to the whole. The small court-yard before the house is entered by two handsome Ionic gate-ways, which, had they been connected together by a low screen, surmounted by an appropriate iron-railing, would have rendered the effect of the whole building elegant and complete But in this country they contrive, in matters of taste, to spoil every thing. They have done so in this instance most effectually, by connecting the gateways to each other by a high screen, surmounted

by couples of Ionic columns reaching to the same height as the gateways themselves; which is more than half the height of the whole building. The effect of this is totally bad; for the columns have nothing to support but themselves, and from the novel predicament in which they are placed, they are not able to do even that with any thing like grace or dignity.

There are two other palaces about four leagues from London, and one about seven. These I have not yet seen.

Next to the palaces, I have enquired for the public offices of the government; but I find most of them are built in such a strange and disorderly style, that it would be impossible for me to give you any distinct idea of them by a description. Indeed I cannot get one myself by looking at them. I here speak of the War-office, the Admiralty, the Treasury, &c. all of which are joined to each other, and form part of the side of a long street.

These buildings, for the same expence which they must have cost, might have been made a splendid ornament to this fine part of the metropolis; but, as it is, from their total want of uniformity or apparent design, they produce no continuity or singleness of effect whatever. The back-fronts of these buildings, which look towards

the Park, though comparatively small and insignificant, are much more uniform and pleasing.

In the same street there is a very good specimen of modern architecture, called Whitehall, out of one of the windows of which Charles I. was led to the scaffold. I could not learn to what purpose this edifice is now appropriated.

Most of the other Government offices are situated in Somerset-house. This is the only public building in London which can be said to have any pretensions to the character of grandeur and magnificence; the only one in which there appears any evidence of a comprehensive and well-digested plan; the only one which for extent, variety, and yet completeness, is worthy of the largest city in the world. Somerset-house is a modern building of Portland-stone. It is situated on the banks of the Thames; over which the grand front looks. This front is elevated on arches; and at high tide it appears to rise, and indeed does rise, out of the water. It extends nearly five hundred feet along the banks of the river. The arches, which spring directly from the bed of the river, support a ballustraded terrace fifty feet wide; immediately behind which the grand front rises. This front is by no means sufficiently elevated to form a corresponding whole with the immense substructure on which it stands —a defect that is especially remarkable at low

water, when the whole basement is exposed to view, and from its disproportionate size, gives the appearance of smallness to what is intended to be the most striking part of the building. This front is not yet finished; but the architecture of it, though more varied in its details, corresponds in style with those parts which I shall describe more particularly. The north front, looking towards the Strand, is an elegant and complete piece of architecture. It consists of a basement of nine arches, of which the three centre ones form the principal entrance to the whole building. On the key-stones of the arches are sculptured masks, representing Ocean, and the eight principal rivers of England. On this basement rises an elegant Corinthian order of ten columns, which support an entablature and ballustrade; and over the three centre intercolumniations is an attic, ornamented with four statues, and surmounted by a sculptured allegorical group. The arches of the basement, and the intercolumniations of the second order, are filled by Doric windows, with pilasters, pediments, &c. The shafts of the Corinthian columns are not fluted; a peculiarity which is, I believe, not authorised by ancient example. On passing through a very beautiful vestibule, formed by the three centre arches of this front, you enter a fine quadrangle considerably more than three hundred

feet long, and two hundred wide, formed by the back-fronts of the two principal elevations which I have described, and by two side fronts to correspond. The style of the architecture of this quadrangle, though varied in parts, yet corresponds generally with the principal fronts—excepting, however, a dome which rises over the south front, and a cupola over each of the sides which join it: These are small and insignificant in themselves, and their effect on the *coup d'œil* from the centre of the quadrangle is totally bad. So also is the effect produced by the paved court of the quadrangle being sunk considerably below the level of the street, and the principal entrance.

I had forgotten to mention that, immediately on passing through the vestibule, you are faced by a bronze statue of the present king, executed by a living artist.* All that struck me concerning this specimen of the Fine Arts, was, that if it had never been produced, it would have been better for the artist, the person whom it represents, and the place where it stands.

Upon the whole, Somerset-house, though it has no peculiar claims to the character either of grandeur or beauty, and though it does not evince genius in the architect, is yet a distinguished

* This statue was executed by the *elder* Bacon, who is long since dead.—Tr.

ornament to the metropolis; and as a structure built for, and exclusively appropriated to, public offices, it is perhaps not to be excelled in Europe.

Although this building has been erected little more than forty years, the sea-coal smoke, and the effects of this horrible climate together, have turned it entirely black, and given it the appearance of age without that of antiquity.

That part of Somerset-house which looks toward the Strand is appropriated to the use of three of the principal public Institutions connected with the Arts and Sciences; viz. The Royal Academy of Arts, the Royal Society, and the Society of Antiquaries. The rest of the building is occupied by different offices, chiefly connected with the administration of the Finance.

The other public buildings of London are chiefly appropriated to commercial purposes. The Bank and the India-house are the chief of these. The Bank is a structure the style of which is, fortunately, quite unique and indescribable; though it has not inaptly been likened to a huge mausoleum. The India-house belongs to the joint-stock company, who are allowed by law certain exclusive privileges in the trade with the East Indies and China. It is a fine stone building, with a noble Corinthian portico; and if it were situated in some open space where it could be seen to

advantage, it would be as great an ornament to the metropolis as any other single building it contains: but its front forms part of the side of a narrow dirty street, where it is totally lost. You pass, as it were, *under* it, and without even seeing it.

Near to this part of the City, there is a single column, raised to commemorate the great fire, which destroyed a considerable part of London about a hundred and fifty years ago. It is fifty feet higher than the column in the Place Vendome; and is of stone, with a sculptured pedestal and a fluted shaft. It stands in the midst of houses, and produces no good or grand effect whatever when you are near it; but, in all the distant views of the metropolis, it forms a very striking object, being considerably higher than any other structure except the dome of St. Paul's. By the bye, does it not evince rather a strange taste, to expend an immense sum in raising a national monument to commemorate a national calamity? And this is called, too, *par excellence*, *The* Monument.

London contains no other public buildings worth particular notice, on their own account, except the bridges over the River Thames; these, however, though they afford little scope for description, are finer single objects of sight than any other structures in London. This arises partly from their

immense extent; but chiefly from the good taste which has been displayed in the building of them. There is, also, a new one now erecting, which is in a state of great forwardness, and is still finer then either of the other three. When finished it will probably be the noblest structure of the kind in Europe.

I'm afraid I have quite tired you with these formal descriptions of tangible and visible objects. But you know our agreement extended to *every thing*. We will, however, have done with these now; and I think I may promise you that the rest of our communications together shall take place in regions in some way or other connected with that of intellect; for nowhere else do I ever feel true freedom or delight, and therefore nowhere else can I expect to receive impressions in the descriptions of which I may hope to convey any pleasure to you.

V. S.

LETTER XIV.

I SHALL write you, my dear S——, two or three long letters on your favourite subject; and I shall begin by confessing to you, that, since I have been here, it has become a favourite subject with me; though, as you know, (and you used to be very angry with me for it) I did not pay much attention to it when I was in Paris with you the last time, whatever I might do the first. I have, it is true, not been here long enough to enable me to form a very correct estimate of the state of dramatic amusements in this country. But if I am very scrupulous on this point, I shall never fulfil half the promises I made on leaving home; so I must e'en venture to send you my remarks just as they arise; leaving for future opportunities any corrections and qualifications that it may be necessary to make in them.

The comparative state of general refinement to which the Fine Arts of different nations have arrived, may be pretty correctly reckoned by the compara-

tive conditions of their acted drama. Perhaps there is no other criterion of the kind so good as this. Applying this, then, to England and France, I think they may be considered as nearly on a level with each other. England is infinitely below France in many respects; but it cannot be denied that France must yield to England in many others. Of the true nature of comedy, properly so called, and of actors and authors of this class, England seems to have very little notion in the present day; and to possess no living example at all. I speak of that gay, graceful, spirited, airy, and *piquante* comedy, which is, or ought to be, nothing more than a refined and heightened image of polished society. M—— tells me that they possess some admirable, and indeed, perfect examples of this kind of writing, which were produced in the witty and licentious reign of Charles II; but that they are seldom acted now—partly from the want of an existing taste for this kind of drama; but chiefly on account of their deficiency in living actors to embody the principal characters. M—— goes so far as to assure me that several of these comedies are greatly superior to any thing of the kind possessed by us in the same department of dramatic literature: but he has not yet persuaded me of the correctness of this opinion; and I'm afraid I shall not (while I am here at least) have time to judge

for myself; if, indeed, the nature of this kind of writing will admit of a foreigner doing so at all. But this objection would apply to his opinion of the French writers, as well as to mine of the English; so that I dare say we shall each keep our own opinion, after all. We both of us agree, however, that at present the English can make no pretensions whatever to the possession of that particular kind of talent here referred to, either in authors or actors; and that the French have a considerable advantage over them in this respect. Under the head of correctness of costume, too, he admits, though somewhat reluctantly, that the great national theatres of England are not equal to ours. On the other hand I am compelled to admit, (which I never thought of being even called upon to do,) that in real tragic talent, as it respects actors, with one splendid exception, we cannot pretend to institute a comparison between ours and those of England, in the present day. Indeed, on this subject, an entirely new light has broken in upon me since I have been here; exactly such an one as burst upon Rousseau when he first became acquainted with Italian music, and was led to compare it with that of France. But I shall speak of this part of the subject hereafter.

In mere farce I believe neither France nor England can claim any very decided superiority over

the other; for if our *petites pièces* surpass theirs in spirit and light-heartedness, theirs surpass ours, in an equal degree, in broad natural humour, and in comic exaggeration. Something of the same kind may perhaps be said of the actors of each country, in this department of the art: though I should be loath to admit that any thing *can* surpass, in their respective styles, Brunet, Potier, Joly, &c. &c. And in fact nothing that they have in England does surpass these, or at all equals the two first; but they have a species of actor, who is qualified to embody and express a species of humour, that we do not exactly possess, and should probably not much relish if we did.

French travellers seem to have been mistaken in the accounts they have given of the number of English theatres. There are as many in London as there are in Paris; with this difference, that they are never all open at the same time. Besides an Italian opera on a very grand scale, and two national theatres for the representation of the regular drama, there is an English Comic Opera on the plan of the Feydeau; a theatre where they usually play short light comic pieces, like those of the Vaudeville and the Variétés; and I believe six others, of the same description as those on the Boulevards. All that I shall have to tell you anything of in detail will be the two *regular* theatres, as they are called,

though they appear to be the least regular of all the others; for they exhibit, in turn, tragedy, comedy, farce, melo-drame, pantomime, horse-riding, rope-dancing, dogs, monkies, fire-works, &c.! Indeed I'm not sure that I may not say they sometimes exhibit all these on one and the same evening! This is, to be sure, in a very barbarous taste. And I the more wonder at it, because, when they do perform the regular drama, the costume is arranged with nearly as much propriety as it is in our own national theatres, and the scenery and decorations are even superior to ours.

But before proceeding to notice that department of the English theatres which appertains to the performance and the management, let me point out to you a few of the particulars connected with the public or audience part of them; for this part of an English theatre, or place of public entertainment of any other kind, presents more peculiar and characteristic traits than the other; and it is for *these* that it is my business chiefly to search.

If I were required to state under what circumstances the cold and selfish, as well as the tasteless and semi-barbarous character of the generality of the English people, is exhibited on the largest scale, and may be studied in its most striking point of view, I should reply, at their public theatres. Let me describe to you the character and behaviour of

an English audience, from the time they reach the theatre till they quit it; at least if your patience can bear with them so long—which mine very seldom can, I assure you.

The doors of the English theatres are opened for the admission of the audience, an hour before the performance begins. We will suppose the occasion to be one on which there is a more than ordinary degree of attraction. In this case a large crowd will be collected at the several outer doors, long before they are opened. (I say the several doors: for you are to understand that there are separate entrances and staircases for the company going to every different part of the theatre; not as with us, where one entrance and one staircase serve for all, because all are quiet and well-behaved). Knowing, as you do, the nature of the crowd collected before the doors of a French theatre, and that each individual takes his place in the line, or *queue*, according to the time he arrives at the spot, and never thinks of quitting that place by forcing himself into a better to which he is not entitled, you will not be able to form the remotest conception of how the process is managed here, where, in cases of this kind, might is regarded as the criterion of right, and where, when a point of self-interest is in question, the relative claims which arise from sex are either entirely unknown, or

entirely disregarded, which is still worse. Fancy, then, not a *queue*, but a solid *mass* of persons of both sexes, to the number of from five hundred to a thousand, collected before a single door five or six feet wide—fancy that door opened at a given signal, but without a moment's warning, and every individual of that number pressing with all his force to that one narrow point of entrance:—fancy this, and then conceive, if you can, the scene which ensues. But you can not. It is a scene at once more characteristic and more disgraceful than any thing of the kind I have ever witnessed. The barbarous howlings and shoutings of the men, and the frightful screamings and faintings of the women, render it absolutely terrific, and such as could be looked for only in a nation of savages, and would certainly not be tolerated for any length of time even there. But here, from the half-reasoning half-savage propensities of the great mass of the people, it is not only tolerated, but *defended*, as the most eligible mode of effecting the desired purpose. If you speak to an Englishman on this subject, he asks you how you would propose to manage the matter better?—and when, in reply, you refer him to the mode adopted at our theatres, (the success of which depends on the observance of a point of justice and good manners) he says, "Oh, that would never do for us!" And he is quite right—it never would!

You are to understand that there is no one appointed to regulate or direct any thing that is going forward during this scene of riot and outrage; for though persons belonging to the Police are usually on the spot, they seem to be placed there only for the purpose of encreasing the danger and confusion, by telling you from time to time to "take care of your pockets!" This is, to be sure, an agreeable way of mending the matter. When you are jammed into close contact with a thief, and cannot possibly either escape or protect yourself from him, you are desired to be careful that he does not rob you! In fact, these Police agents know and recognize every one of those in the crowd (and there are generally several on these occasions) who come there expressly, and as far as regards the Police agents, *avowedly*, for the purpose of robbing; yet these officers of justice never think of removing them, or of interfering with their objects, except by informing you, when it is too late, that such persons are present: and they never do even this till the crowd becomes so dense that all but those at the outward extremities of it cannot escape from it if they would.

I have never heard an Englishman even attempt to account for or defend this strange mode of furthering the ends of justice on the part of his rulers; so I shall do so for them, by saying that I

suppose it is to be regarded as one of the results of a Briton's boasted *liberty*. The argument probably is this;—that a professed pick-pocket possesses as unquestionable a right to go to the theatre for his amusement as a man of any other profession; and that to stop him on his way thither, would be to infringe on his birth-right as a free-born Englishman. If indeed, in the course of your joint progress thither, you are lucky enough to detect him in exercising his profession to your cost, you may, *if you can*, hand him over to the Police agent in attendance, who will in that case readily take charge of the culprit, and he will inevitably be punished. But otherwise, I suppose you are bound, though you know him to be a robber, to follow the Police agent's example, and treat him as a gentleman, for so the said agent evidently does; and this at the expence, in two different ways, of all the honest people present: for though he warns you of the necessity of guarding your property against *somebody*, and though he knows to a certainty who that somebody is, yet he never gives you the slightest hint by which you can fix your suspicions on any particular person; so that every individual in the crowd, *except the pickpocket himself*, is obliged, in his own defence, to suspect every other with whom he may come in contact. The truth is, that the Police agents

here are paid, not to *prevent* crime, but only to *detect* it when committed; and if you were to apply to them for an explanation of their conduct on these occasions, they would, I dare say, be candid enough to give you this, as the only true and intelligible one.

Let us now accompany the audience to the interior of the theatre; previously mentioning that the price of admission to the whole of the boxes is the same—about nine francs; that to the pit about half; and that to the two galleries about fifty sous, and twenty-five. In the pit, (that part which answers to our parterre) we shall find a tolerably well-dressed and reputable looking company, of both sexes; forming what usually appears to me to be the most respectable, as well as the most enlightened and attentive part of an English audience. It consists of persons from the middle classes of society, who really pay their money to see the performance: which can rarely be said of the persons frequenting any other part of the house. In fact, this is the only portion of the audience which can in any degree be compared to the audience of a French theatre, either in regard to their object in attending, or the decency and decorum of their behaviour while there. The females in the pit are always dressed in a walking costume.

In that part which is called the dress boxes, which consists of a circle of boxes immediately above the pit, are usually seated a motley group of persons, whose appearance it would be as difficult to describe as it would be to ascertain to what particular classes of society they severally belong. But it may be safely stated that they usually comprise a mixture of all classes, except the very highest and the very lowest; for unless the places in a box have been previously retained by any particular party, no one can be refused admittance into them who has by whatever means gained admittance into the box part of the theatre at all; and I believe it may be considered that, on ordinary nights, at least one third of the persons in the boxes have gained admission gratuitously, by means of what are called free-orders—which are not, as with us, chiefly confined to particular persons, but are allowed to be given to their friends by the performers, and others connected with the theatre, in order that this part of the house may not have that wretched appearance of emptiness, which, from its enormous size, it inevitably would nine nights out of ten, but for this plan. From this preposterous arrangement, as to the right of admission to the boxes generally, it results that a lady may, and in fact actually does sometimes, find herself seated in the same box side by side with the

person who fitted on her shoes in the morning, or dressed her hair an hour ago.

There can be no doubt that it is this ridiculously defective arrangement, as to the right of admission to particular places, which has induced persons of family and fashion almost entirely to withdraw their patronage from the national theatres. In fact, they scarcely ever attend them now, except on very particular occasions; and even then, if they do not possess a private box, of which there are very few, they always contrive to go in a party sufficient to *fill* a box of themselves: for, if they did not adopt this plan, at the end of the first act of the play, any one outside of the box might demand the vacant places. But, on ordinary nights, the company in the dress boxes may certainly be regarded as the least respectable part of the audience, (with the exception of the mere *canaille* who occupy what are called the galleries) the price of admission to *all* the boxes being alike, and there being no exclusion on account of dress, except that the females must be without bonnets.

Proceeding upwards, we reach the three other tiers of boxes; which are occupied by a class of persons nearly similar, in appearance, to those in the pit, but generally speaking not so respectable in station. Immediately in a line with and above these, are the two galleries, which are frequented by almost the

lowest class of the people.—We have now the whole of the audience before us. Let us take a slight glance at the behaviour of each several portion of it, and then leave them to themselves: for I have never yet formed a part of one of them, and cannot do so now, even in imagination, without being heartily sick and tired of my company, as I dare say you are already with the description of them.

Each of the two national theatres of London is larger than any theatre in Paris; and from some defect in the construction of them, it is impossible to hear a word that passes on the stage, at any greater distance from it than about the sixth or seventh row of the pit, unless there is an absolute silence and attention preserved in every part of the house. Now, as this silence and attention are never preserved in *any* part of the house, it necessarily follows that every thing which takes place on the stage is absolutely unintelligible to almost every person present, except the few who are situated in the front of the pit. I declare to you that this is an unexaggerated statement of my own experience on the subject. I have repeatedly been to every part of the house, and found that, except when I was in the front of the pit, I could almost as little judge of the performance, and be as little amused and interested by it, as if I had been

any where else. I have said that the persons in the pit actually come to see and hear the performance; consequently they pay a tolerable degree of attention to it, but nothing like the same degree that is paid by the same class of persons in a French theatre. As to the other parts of the audience, the performance is, on ordinary occasions, quite a secondary matter with them. They go to the theatre to shew themselves, or to meet with their friends, or to escape from their enemy, *ennui*—or because they have nothing else to do; or because, if they do not go, they cannot have to say to-morrow that they were at the theatre last night; (and if they had not *this* to say, what *could* they say?)—or they go for any reason you choose to imagine, except to see and attend to what is going forward on the stage. To expect an Englishman to go out of and forget himself, in order to attend to what "does not concern him," as he would say, would be a most unreasonable and unphilosophical expectation indeed, and one which he would consider as a mere impertinence. Do you suppose he has nothing better to do than listen to Romeo making love—or watch Macbeth scaling the giddy heights of ambition—or be tossed hither and thither with Othello on the tumbling ocean of passion—or accompany Hamlet, as he pierces the depths of

our mortal life? I can assure you that he is able to find much more attractive and edifying subjects of cogitation. He is thinking of the money he made yesterday by the turn of stocks, or that which he *shall* make to-morrow by a projected speculation; or of the new house he is building on Clapham Common, and how he shall furnish this or that room in it; or of the new horse he bought to-day, and means to sport in the Park to-morrow; or of fifty other things, equally instructive and interesting, all of which he can think of at the theatre as well as any where else, otherwise he would not go there.

From all this it results that the audience part of an English theatre presents a scene, which, in a Paris theatre, would be considered as one of actual disturbance and confusion; and during the continuance of which, or of a tenth part of it, the performance would not be permitted to proceed for a moment. During the whole of the first act of the play (which is frequently the most interesting, and always that which is most necessary to be attended to, in order to the proper understanding and appreciating of what follows) you are amused with the perpetual opening and shutting of box-doors, and the audible calls of "Mrs. So and So's places;" for if you have taken places, it is quite *mauvais ton* to arrive at them before the performance begins. This, added to the perpetual whispering,

and frequently the audible talking, which surrounds you in all the boxes; and the mingled sounds of singing, shouting, laughing, whistling, cat-calling, quarrelling, and fighting, which proceed at intervals from the two galleries, (the frequenters of which wisely and naturally enough take the best means they can of amusing themselves, since their distance from the stage precludes them from hearing, and almost from seeing, any thing that passes;) this, I say, altogether presents a scene little to be expected in the national theatre of a polished people; but, still, little to be wondered at, when the size of the house is considered, and when it is remembered, too, that the English are a people who cannot for any length of time go out of their individual selves, even in search of amusement; or rather, who cannot *find* amusement in any thing which takes them out of themselves.

When I have noticed that, with their usual want of regard to what is due to the sex, the men frequently wear their hats and great-coats in the boxes—sit in front while there are females sitting behind—rise between the acts and sit on the fronts of the boxes, with their backs to the audience—get up to go away in the middle of an interesting scene, and thus force the whole company in a box, to rise and let them pass—and commit numerous other breaches of good manners and decorum of the same kind, I have told you enough to let

you know that an English theatre, with all the splendour of its embellishments, the beauty of its scenery, and the grandeur of its effect as a *coup-d'œil*, is sadly inferior to a French theatre, as a place of elegant and refined amusement for a polished and intellectual people.

I now willingly turn to the English actors; lamenting that they do not meet with audiences more worthy of them, or (which perhaps amounts to the same thing) that they have not moderate sized theatres, where they could create for themselves such audiences; for, to be able to see and hear some of the best English actors, and not to yield them attention and admiration, seems to demand a degree of uncivilized insensibility which can scarcely be supposed to belong to a nation that could produce such actors. And, in fact, the general admiration, and even enthusiasm, which the actors I am speaking of excite, and the brilliant and just reputation they enjoy, (by *reflection*, I suppose, from the few who really do see, hear, and appreciate them, to the many who do not) prove that a very great share of the fault belongs to the enormous size of the theatres, and the consequent necessity, or at least the temptation, that a great portion of the audience are under, (since they go there for amusement, and pay so dear for going) to do what they can to amuse themselves.

V. S.

LETTER XV.

In Tragedy the English have, I think, more merely *good* actors than we have; but a merely good actor is the most insipid person in the world to describe; so I shall tell you no more about them. But there is one tragic actor on the London stage, by whom I have been so deeply interested, and whose powers appear to me of so extraordinary a description, that I shall take some pains to give you an idea of them. His name is Kean. The coincidence of name with our own celebrated *Le Kain* is remarkable. He is quite young, not more than six or seven and twenty; and this is only his second season in London; and yet he has already established a reputation nearly as great as that of Talma. I expect, too, that you'll be a little startled, if not scandalized, when I tell you that I think he deserves it; that he is, upon the whole, as great an actor; that he possesses as consummate a judgment, as pure and delicate taste, as clear, quick, and vivid

conceptions, and as admirable and wondrous a power of embodying those conceptions. For physical powers, he is about as much and as little indebted to nature as Talma is: but it is remarkable, that whatever Talma wants Kean has, and whatever Kean wants, Talma has. Unlike Talma, Kean's person is insignificant, and his voice totally bad; and unlike Talma also, his eye is like lightning, and his face has a power of expression that is perfectly magical. The action of Talma is less constrained and redundant than that of any other French tragedian; but Kean's is still less so than his. It has much more variety, and yet is much more simple and natural; his attitude in any given situation being precisely that which a consummate painter would assign to it. If I were to notice the general resemblance and the general difference between these two extraordinary actors, I should say that both draw their sources fresh and direct from nature, and that both study her as she exists in the depths of their own hearts; but that Talma has more imagination than passion, and Kean more passion than imagination: not that Talma wants passion, or that Kean wants imagination; but passion is the *characteristic* of the one, and imagination of the other. When Talma exclaims in Macbeth, "Il est là! là!" the strength of his

imagination kindles that of the spectators, till they absolutely *see* the image of the murdered king reflected from his face. His imagination is still more conspicuous in the tremendous power he gives to the words in the same play "Arrête donc ce sang qui coule jusqu'à moi!" But surely the most splendid and astonishing of all theatrical exhibitions, and the effects of which are to be attributed to the realising power of his imagination, is that of Talma in Œdipus, at the moment he discovers his involuntary crimes. It is a thing to be seen once, and remembered for ever; but not to be described. Kean has nothing like this in the same class of acting. His characteristic, as I have said, is passion — passion under all its names and varieties—through all its windings and blendings—in all its delicate shades and most secret recesses. Its operation never for a moment ceases to be visible; for, when he ceases to speak, every motion of his thoughts is absolutely legible in the astonishingly varied expression of his face, and eye, and action. Passion seems to be the very breath of his mental existence, or rather its vital stream, into which every thing else resolves itself. If he has to express love, his whole soul seems to cling to the being on whom he is gazing —his voice melts—his eye swims and trembles—and the words fall from his lips as if *they* were the

smallest part of what he would express. And in all this there is no shew — no endeavour — no pretence: for real love is the most unpretending thing in the world—the most quiet—the most able to repose upon itself, and the most willing to do so. If hatred and revenge are his themes, it is hardly possible to imagine yourself looking at or listening to the same person. His eyes glare—his teeth grind against each other—his voice is hoarse and broken—his hands clench and open alternately, as if they were revelling in the blood of his enemy, and his whole frame seems to have imbibed the will and the powers of a demon. This actor's delineation of all the other violent passions—as remorse, jealousy, despair, &c. seem to me to possess alike, a force, a truth, and a distinctness, which render them almost perfect. And all is done, too, without the slightest appearance of art or effort. It is scarcely possible, while you are seeing him, to recollect that he is an actor; and he himself seems never, for a moment, to feel that he has an audience before him. Kean's picture of remorse, as it affects Macbeth after the murder of Duncan, if it has not the overwhelming and terrific force of that of Talma in the same play, has, I think, more variety, more intensity, and more truth. There is no extravagant and hurried action—no loud and vehement tones of voice;

there is no bursting forth of the flames—they are all within, and are only to be discovered by their torturing and withering effects upon the outward frame. The eye is fixed and vacant—the hands hang down motionless, or are clenched in the fruitless endeavour to suppress the agony of soul—the knees tremble, and scarcely support the body; in the general and total convulsion of the frame, the tongue refuses to obey the will, and the voice becomes choaked and lost in forced attempts at utterance. To all this succeeds a dead calm, which is not less fearful than the agitation that preceded. There is a point at which human suffering destroys itself. His agonized mind, and exhausted body, can endure no more; and they sink together into a motionless stupor. A loud knocking is at this instant heard at the gate of the castle; but there he stands in the open hall, with the bloody witness of his guilt upon his hands, yet nothing can rouse him; and at last his wife drags him away by force to his chamber. I have no hesitation in telling you that I think this piece of acting, (including from the time Macbeth quits the chamber of Duncan till he is forced away to his own) though it is not so tremendous as some parts of Talma's Œdipus, nor so fearfully grand as his Orestes, nor so, what I should call, *beautiful* as the Hamlet of that actor, is, without exception, the

most affecting and impressive exhibition I have ever beheld.

But there is one other character in which this actor displays still greater powers than he does in Macbeth; a character in which he appears to me to have reached the absolute perfection of his art, in the very highest class of it. This is the Othello of Shakespeare. You know I am not very familiar with this celebrated English dramatist: but since I first saw Kean in Othello, I have taken great pains to make myself acquainted with this play in particular. I've seen it twice since, and read it twice; and though I've been a good deal puzzled by some of the old phraseology, yet the more intimately I come to understand it, the more I am astonished at the writer who could draw so miraculously true a picture of the human heart, and the more delighted admiration I feel towards the actor who can turn this picture into a living human being, and place it before us in all the breathing reality of flesh and blood.

In another letter I shall give you some account of this play, and of Kean's performance in it.

V. S.

LETTER XVI.

Nothing can be more beautifully imagined, in order to give effect to the scenes in which they are to be placed, than the characters of Othello and his wife Desdemona. The Moor is a being formed in the very prodigality of nature: he has every thing in excess. But he is formed by nature alone: his positive qualities are therefore all noble ones. He is bold, generous, faithful, and confiding. Custom and society have not laid their withering hands upon him, so that at a somewhat advanced stage of life, he has retained all those qualities which usually belong exclusively to particular periods of it. He has at once the simplicity of childhood, the ardour of youth, and the wisdom of maturity. Until the opening of the play glory had been the idol of his existence; but, with him, ambition itself was a virtue, for it was only a modification of love. His fine mind must have something on which to rest; and it had fixed itself, at first, on "the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war." At length,

however, he finds a being to whom his own can approximate a thousand times more closely. They see, hear, and understand each other—become linked together in (when they are kept pure) the strongest of all human ties—those of flesh and blood;—and thenceforth *she* becomes the beacon of all his hopes, the guiding star of his daily life. With Desdemona he lays up the treasures of his heart—in her his thoughts dwell as in a sanctuary. His former love of glory was but an imagination. *Then* glory was his love, now love is his only glory. *Then*, in his vain and restless search after happiness, he would not willingly have died even in the arms of victory: an indefinite anticipation of something better would have led him still to covet life. But *now*—now that he has found and felt the very certainty and fulness of bliss, he almost *wishes* to die in the midst of it. "If it were now to die, 'twere now to be most happy!" he exclaims, in the passionate, yet quiet and almost weeping excess of his joy. This is the very sublimity of love—that is to say, the very truth and simplicity of it.

There is but one set off against the beauties of Othello's character: he possesses an ungoverned and ungovernable will. But notwithstanding its fatal effects in the sequel, one cannot help regarding this defect with a mixture of love; for it is evidently the result of his good qualities, or at least

it is a necessary concomitant of them. The very circumstances which would have been required to regulate *that*, would have withered and destroyed *them*. While this tremendous power lies dormant, though the Moor is a being made up of impulses, yet as they are all natural, and therefore all good ones, the stream of his thoughts and actions flows on, like a beautiful river, through flowers and sunshine, to the sound of its own music; but when once it meets with a check, all becomes changed at once and for ever. The will awakes, never more to sleep but in death. It urges forward that till now tranquil stream, till it becomes at last the minister of destruction to itself, and every thing around it.

This leads me to speak of Othello's jealousy. He who would judge sanely of any of the nobler productions either of art or nature, must first prepare himself to do so by casting off the trammels of custom. When first I came to the contemplation of this sublime tragedy, I was disposed to think of Othello as of a savage, jealous by his very nature. His name never occurred to my thoughts unconnected with that passion. I imagined him a personification of it. But what do I find him in reality? Of all the characters that history or fiction ever pourtrayed, Othello's is the last that would have an aptitude to jealousy. I almost

think such a character could not be jealous. If his wife really had deceived him, *he* would have been the very last person in all the world to find it out; and when he *did*, he would not be jealous. And in fact Othello is not jealous for one instant, during the whole play. This would, I know, sound like a paradox, to the every-day admirers of Shakespeare; but, from what I have hitherto seen of them, I should not, on that account, doubt its truth. The history of Othello's mind, during the time he is before us, may be given in three words. It begins with love, unmixed and unbounded love, for Desdemona. He thinks with her mind—he sees with her eyes—his body and soul are hers—in her he breathes and exists. At length a villain makes him doubt of her fidelity to his bed. Few men can anticipate their future resolves with so much certainty as Othello can. The nature of his character enables him to do this; for custom has placed no moral restraints upon it. When Iago bids him beware of jealousy, he replies—

> "Think'st thou I'd lead a life of jealousy?" &c.
>
> *   *   *
>
> "No—when I doubt I'll prove, and on the proof
> No more but this—away at once with love
> And jealousy."

He is afterwards persuaded to think, (for he

never once *feels*) that he has found this proof; and thenceforth his being is divided between alternate paroxysms of grief and revenge, in each of which are blended glances and reminiscences of the other; and throughout the whole runs a deep though almost undiscernible stream of love:—But there is no jealousy.

At length, after he has destroyed Desdemona, the Moor discovers that she was innocent; and *then* his love—I will not say returns, for it had never for a moment left him, it had only retired to the hidden recesses of his bosom—then it becomes paramount again in all its power and glory; and, nothing being left to support it but a weakened and bewildered spirit, and a broken heart, it presses upon him with the weight of a world, and crushes him. But that fatal promptitude, which had caused all his miseries, still remains; and it now serves to cure them all, by at once telling him that "'tis happiness to die." He believes the truth as readily as he had believed the falsehood, and he dies.—Jealousy! it is the sensualist's passion, who feels it in his blood; or the libertine's, who feels it in his conscience; or the scholar's, who feels it in his head; or the courtier's, who feels it in his heart. Like avarice, it is not inherent in the nature of man, but grows out of the accidents of society. It is the paltry and selfish passion of towns and cities.

It never did, and never could pollute so pure a shrine as Othello's breast; for society had no share in the formation of that—all its strengths being those of nature;—and it must be confessed that all its weaknesses were those of nature too.

To Othello's destinies Shakespeare has linked those of a being, of whom, since I have become acquainted with her, I cannot even think without delight. Desdemona is full of faults. She has all the weaknesses of a woman loving and beloved, and all the inexperience of a child; and is therefore perpetually acting exactly as prudence would forbid her to act: and yet she is, to me, an abstract of all womanly perfections. Her very failings are far from being the least part of those perfections; for it is they that keep her a mere *human* being: and it is only such that human beings can sympathise with and love.

Genius has in all ages delighted to honour the female character; but it has never, before or since, done so with such beautiful effect as in that of Desdemona. With her, virtue and happiness seem to be comprised in the union of obedience and love. Love is the foundation of her character—love the most comprehensive and enduring, and yet (or perhaps I should say *therefore*,) the most quiet and unobtrusive. From what we learn of her thoughts and actions before she loved and married Othello,

we may conclude that she was, at that time, far from wanting in a proper distinctness and decision of character. But now that she has become *his*, she no longer desires to remain *her own*. Her thoughts, her wishes, her will, are all merged, blended, and lost in his. She no longer feels or desires to feel that she possesses a being of her own; her one and only delight is to be a part of him. Hence arises her unmurmuring and unceasing patience, under an injury the deepest and the strongest that can be inflicted on such a woman. To doubt her love is like doubting her existence; for she feels her love to be the very breath, the blood, the essence of her existence. Yet she hears this doubt without a thought or a feeling approaching to resentment. She wonders, and weeps, and suffers; but, so far from resenting, or even complaining, she kneels down to heaven, in the absence of the being who has thus injured her, and pours forth new vows of everlasting love and constancy to him. At length the Moor, as he thinks, proves her to be false; and then it is that she closes and crowns her life by the sublimest act of self-devotion that the imagination ever contemplated. Desdemona is a christian; and therefore believes that, to pour forth her last breath in a deliberate lie, will inevitably consign her everlasting soul to perdition; *yet this she does*, in order to screen from temporary

obloquy and punishment the being who has that moment inflicted on her a guiltless death! This is, in truth, the very religion of love! What were all the martyrs that ever lived or died to this! *They* sacrificed their own temporal for their own eternal happiness; but SHE sacrifices her own eternal, for the temporal happiness of another; and that other the being who had first doubted and then destroyed her!

V. S.

LETTER XVII.

If I was a little disappointed at seeing the character of Desdemona on the stage after I had been reading and studying the play, I attribute it entirely to the defective performance of it; for it was not given to Miss O'Neil, the only tragic actress I have ever seen whom I should think capable of forming the most distant conception of its beauties. (I shall give you a more particular account of this lady hereafter.) I am the more sure that this must have been the true reason of my disappointment, because Kean's performance of Othello produced a directly contrary effect. After having studied the play over and over again, I did think that nothing could heighten my conception of the powers required to produce such a work: but it *was* heightened in a very remarkable degree by Kean's performance; which was indeed, in the strictest, and at the same time the most enlarged sense of the word, an *illustration* of Shakespeare. Undoubtedly, as I have hinted before, Talma's Œdipus is more overwhelming and terrific; and some parts of his Macbeth are more awful and

appalling; and the scene after the murder, in Kean's own Macbeth, is, as a single tragic picture, more permanently affecting and impressive: but I suppose that, as a whole, Kean's Othello is, without exception, the very finest display of the histrionic art that was ever witnessed. Indeed I have little hesitation in adding (at least to you,) what would, I dare say, sound perfectly extravagant even to the most extravagant of Kean's English admirers,— that I know not where to point out the single effort of any one man, in ancient or modern times, in either of the Fine Arts, of Poetry, Sculpture, Painting, or Music, which exhibits, as far as it goes, a more unequivocal proof and example of pure genius, and of its existence in a more rare and intense degree; a genius combining, in one effort, a greater portion of its most essential component parts— namely, passion, imagination, and judgment.

I did intend to have given you a sketch of this whole performance from beginning to end; but it would require more time than I can spare for it now: and after all I should not be able to make it intelligible to you, from your being unacquainted with the tragedy. I must reserve it as a subject for our talk when we meet again. But though every other part of the performance is equally essential to it as a consistent whole, the third act is by far the most striking. It is in this part that a false

friend of Othello's gradually excites in him—not jealousy,—for, as I said before, that is not in his nature—but the conviction that Desdemona is false to his bed; on which he gives orders for the murder of her supposed paramour, and determines to destroy her. This whole act is, from first to last, one storm of passion—passion touching all the various notes of its scale, from the lofty and tumultuous thunderings that reach the very height of sublimity, to the low and half-inaudible murmurs which sound the very depths of pathos. Blank incredulity at first, then doubt, conviction, rage, revenge, hatred, despair—all occupy and contend for his heart and soul, like so many demons raving round a new inhabitant of hell. But amidst all the discordant sounds which they utter, there is still to be distinguished (if you *listen* for it) a low, distant, sphere-like music: it is the under-tone, the *holding-note* of love—deep, unchangeable, inextinguishable love!

In the first scene, Iago endeavours to excite Othello's suspicions, by insinuating that there is something mysterious in the circumstance of Cassio having quitted Desdemona abruptly, just at the moment that they (Othello and Iago) were entering the apartment; and he succeeds in raising the Moor's suspicions, but they do not point where he intends they should. From Othello's high

opinion of his friend's judgment and integrity, he is induced to believe it possible that Cassio may have designs upon his wife; but he entertains and speaks of this suspicion with perfect calmness and self-possession, for it never once enters his thoughts that Iago can intend to implicate Desdemona. He insists, however, upon knowing his friend's inmost thoughts on the subject; but the latter absolutely refuses to disclose them, on the ground that it were not for Othello's good that he should know them. He then most artfully follows this by reflections on the inestimable value of good-name "in man and *woman*." At this word "woman," and not till this, the poisoned shaft is sped; and, a few instants after, it reaches its mark. We seem to watch its course through the air which it pollutes, till it reaches and pierces the breast of its noble and devoted victim. We see—we almost *feel* it enter! He utters but one electric syllable—"Ha!"—pauses for a moment, as if struck by death; and then rushes forward, with the fatal weapon sticking in his flesh, and its venom rankling in his blood—the minister of desolation and death to all around him! This sublime conception, of concentrating such a world of passion into one monosyllable, was undoubtedly Shakespeare's; but M—— tells me that Kean alone has the merit of discovering and illustrating it; that all former Othellos were jealous of

Desdemona long before this part of the scene. It is one of the most striking characteristics of Kean, that he condenses more variety and power of expression into *one word*, than any other actor of the day, without any comparison whatever. In this single syllable we can actually trace, or fancy we trace, (which is the same thing, for it is he who enables us to do so), the emotions of doubt, conviction, astonishment, rage, hatred, revenge,—all mingling and combining into one fearful cry, like that tumultuous and discordant yell which accompanies and announces the first shock of two mighty armies when they meet in deadly battle. After this first burst of passion, his love for a moment returns in all its power and beauty, like the last momentary breaking forth of the moon athwart the storm-clouds that are gathering about it; and when Iago warns him to "beware of jealousy," he spurns the thought away from him with calm collected indignation. But it will not do. The wound has been inflicted by a barbed as well as a poisoned dart, and there is no extracting it but with life itself. The pain of it may be lulled for a moment by returning love, or deadened by despair; but there the weapon sticks, and festers, and seems to *take root*, as it were, and absorb all the blood and spirits, converting them to its own proper nourishment. During this part of the scene Othello con-

tinues in that state of total exhaustion which always follows the first paroxysm of violent passion. He seems bewildered and lost. He answers by short phrases, or by monosyllables, or not at all. His whole soul seems to be laid bare for the fiend Iago to wind and fasten his deadly spells about it. This he does most effectually; and then retires, and leaves them to work. When he is gone, Othello recovers a little from his stupor, and reflects, as coherently as he can, on what has happened; and he takes shelter for a moment in the thought that he "*must loathe her.*" Loathe *her!* Alas! poor stricken deer! This is but to aggravate his misery—this is but to dash his lacerated body on the ground, and force the weapon still deeper into his festering flesh. Immediately after this, Desdemona enters—she whom he was to loathe. And mark the consequence! At the very sight of her, all his still existing love rushes back to his heart, (for it was still hovering, like a protecting spirit, above his head), and with it all his confidence in her returns. "If *she* be false," he exclaims, "Oh! then heaven mocks itself! I'll not believe it." So with a half-sigh he breathes away the mists that were gathering round him—clasps her to his heart—and is happy again.

After this a short scene ensues, in which Iago contrives another strong evidence of Desdemona's

guilt; and then awaits the Moor's coming. At length he comes; and then commences the grand scene of the tragedy. Never before did I witness such a splendid exhibition of human talent as this scene calls forth from this wonderful actor. I have heard the greatest orators of the day declaim —the most celebrated divines preach—the most inspired poets talk, in the moment of their highest inspiration;—but never before did I experience such high and unmingled admiration and delight—never before did I feel so impressed, so awe-stricken, yet at the same time so elevated, by the living and actual presence of such intense genius. It would be idle to attempt a detailed description of this scene, unless I could go through it line by line. I can only tell you, generally, that it was Kean's grandest display of his grand characteristic —passion—a stormy sea of passion—pure unmixed passion—passion in all its weakness and in all its power, in its heights and its depths, its heaven, its earth, and its hell! Othello himself likens his thoughts to "the Pontick Sea" that

> "Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
> To the Propontick and the Hellespont;"

And in this scene, as exhibited by this actor, they are indeed an ocean, whose self-creating waves now burst and thunder upon the shore, and now

rush upward and mingle with the clouds—now for a moment they are allayed, and the moonlight of love beautifies their hushed and heaving bosoms; but the next instant they are seen opening up and laying bare those secret depths that are usually hidden even from the inhabitants of them. It is altogether a most awful exhibition, in which the miraculous truth of the delineation gives it the air of a pure effusion of nature, while the unceasing self-possession of the exhibitor keeps our sympathies within the due bounds of pleasure, by exciting throughout a secret consciousness that it can be nothing but a finished effort of art.

It is needless to tell you more of the rest of this performance, than that it is all in keeping with this wonderful scene; and it undoubtedly forms the noblest piece of acting on the living stage.

I wonder what the English would say to my admiration of their favourite actor;—for he *is* their favourite, though they hardly seem to know it. At the theatre, indeed, the magical power of his genius occasionally works them up into something approaching to enthusiasm; but when they get home again it is all forgotten; and if you ask their opinion of him, they tell you that he is a very clever little fellow, with an indifferent person and a bad voice, and that it's a pity he's not more prudent in his private character; that he makes

an uncommonly good Richard III., but that in Hamlet he is not near so much of a *gentleman* as Kemble was, and that they don't think he could play Coriolanus at all! and that's all they know about the matter! Even among the Critics there is but one who has had the skill, the courage, or the candour to speak of Kean as he deserves.* How paltry this is—to withhold from a man the homage that his genius merits, merely because he is alive to receive and enjoy it!

V. S.

* I suppose my friend alludes to the critiques that appeared in the Morning Chronicle and the Examiner about this time, said to be written by Mr. Hazlitt.—Tr.

LETTER XVIII.

The English tragic performer who has struck me as being most worthy of notice, next to Kean, is the young actress I have mentioned before,—Miss O'Neil. She is, I believe, not more than twenty; and there is nothing very remarkable in either her face or figure, though both of them are perfectly pleasing. It is of her acting alone that I shall have to speak; and in this there is something so very peculiar, and at the same time so totally unlike any thing we have on the French stage, that I expect I shall find it very difficult to express to you what I feel about her. Her nature seems to be made up of two elements only; smiles and tears. She seems formed to experience but two emotions; joy and grief. At least all others seem to be but modifications of these; and these two proceed from different movements of but one passion,—that of love. She is indeed the chosen and devoted priestess of love's temple. He weeps or smiles in her eyes, plays or droops about her mouth, grieves or rejoices or triumphs in the tones of her voice, moves in every movement of her form; she seems unable to think, or feel, or exist but by and

through him; and those thoughts and feelings, and that existence, seem at all times ready to be offered up as willing sacrifices at his shrine.—I mean to state this as the peculiar *characteristic* of her talents; or rather her gifts,—for talent is much too formal a word to use with reference to any of the qualities that belong to Miss O'Neil as an actress. Talent seems to imply something of study and acquirement; but she is purely a gifted being; the very *ideal* of feminine nature, as it was conceived by the English poets of the age of Elizabeth; and with the exception of our own Rousseau, by them alone, either before or since. A being who, at a certain period of her life, (that period at which poetry so delights to exhibit her, and of which alone I now speak,) has, and desires to have, no existence but in the mind of him she loves; no possessions but his and her own affections; no happiness but in the creation and the contemplation of his; who knows no law (I had almost said no religion,) but her love; no pride but her obedience; no glory but her self-devotion: whose thoughts are the images of her lord's; her fears the reflection of his; her wishes the offspring of his: who has no country but in his mind; no home but in his presence; no heaven but in his heart: for she feels no life, f[illegible] no death, and hopes for no futurity but in and with him! By all this I mean, that in the charac-

ters which suit Miss O'Neil best, she gives one the idea of precisely such a being as this. Apparently helpless and defenceless as she is, with one weapon only, her tears—that one is more unanswerable than the smiles of the Egyptian Queen, more eloquent than the pen of the Greek poetess, more resistless than even the tongue of the Athenian virago herself. Her tears, aided by the deep pathos of her voice, are not to be argued with or replied to. Their united power goes directly to its own appropriate region, the heart; and there is no closing the avenues against it.

Some of the critics here do not very well know what to make of this lady. The public found out her merits before *they* did; which has a good deal detracted from those merits. She has not the force of one dead actress, they say—nor the dignity of another—nor the grace of a third—nor several other incomparable qualities of several others; and, accordingly, they are not at all sure that she *ought* to delight the audience so much as she does. But they go to see her, (at least their readers do) and the light of one of her smiles, or the breath of one sigh, disperses all their theory in a moment, and they have no more to say about her. This is g as it should be. That which is perfect in is not a fit subject for critics to meddle with. We know all about it without their help. We

feel that it is so, and there is an end of the matter: for what more can they tell us? Undoubtedly we have nothing like this lady in tragedy; but if the talents of Mademoiselle Mars had been turned in that direction, it is probable there would have been a great similarity between them. At least if the purely artificial character of French tragedy had permitted any thing of the kind. But it would not.

V. S.

LETTER XIX.

I HAVE found so much to say of England's greatest tragic actor, that I must press my notice of those which remain into a smaller compass than I at first intended, or than their distinguished merits deserve.

If Kean himself is alone a fit support and ornament to the majestic fabric of Shakespeare's genius; or at least, if he is the *most* fit to support that department of it which has been raised by the intervention of Nature herself, and bears her true and unmixed *Doric* form and impress, there are other portions of it which are well and aptly upborne by the *Ionic* grace and elegance of Charles Kemble, the florid *Corinthian* of Young, and the *Composite* of Macready—who, in fact, combines in a very remarkable manner, the qualities and characters of each of these styles or orders.

To quit the above metaphor, (which, I warn you, is not good for much as an illustration, though it is not worth while to erase it,) in the person and acting of Charles Kemble are united those attributes and characteristics which may be said to form the distinguishing differences between the best of

ancient and of modern times; the presence of which characteristics it is the fashion to indicate by the epithets CLASSICAL and ROMANTIC. He is equally fitted to impersonate the hero of an ancient epic, or of a modern romance; Diomed, shouting to his blood-be-painted followers at the siege of Troy, or Romeo, sighing forth his soul among moon-lit flowers, beneath the window of Juliet. His air, his gestures, his face, his form, his voice, and the colour and complexion of his rich and enthusiastic mind, which shines out through all these, mark him as an especial favourite of Nature—as one chosen and privileged to do her best and loftiest biddings. He treads the stage as if he felt himself to be a denizen of some other sphere, or some by-gone age,—as if he were *on* the earth, but not *of* it. I can even fancy that he must have adopted the stage as a profession, merely because it afforded him occasions of cultivating and pampering those high imaginations in which his spirit seems to float as in a dream; because it enabled him to "live, and move, and have his being" in an ideal world of impossible grandeur and beauty; impossible, because *past*: for that which *has been* can never be again, *because* it has been. It is done, and over. Even a new Deluge could not restore the days of Priam and Achilles, or Plato and Pericles, or Cæsar and Brutus; or even those of Amadis, Palmerin, and

Orlando. Nothing can do it but "strong imagination." The imagination of Charles Kemble, I have no doubt, does this for himself whenever he is performing a character belonging to either of those ages; and its outward and visible results, aided by the omnipotent one of Shakespeare, do it in a degree even for the spectator who is at all qualified to appreciate the personations of this elegant actor.

Until you have an opportunity of seeing Charles Kemble yourself, I do not think that any detail into which I might enter, respecting his performances, could give you a better idea of him than you may gain from the general remarks I have made above. In the meantime, you may think of him as, in every outward respect, a worthy representative of one of the *Preux Chévaliers* of our old French times; and you may, if you please, take this occasion to increase, if possible, your enthusiasm towards those times, by contrasting this symbol of them with the mixture of ruffianism and petit-maitreship, so aptly characterising those which have taken their place.

Young is an actor of quite a different class from any other on the English stage. His style is neither purely natural, like that of Kean, nor a blending of the classical and romantic, like Charles Kemble's, nor a mixture of all these three, like Macready's. It is not formed on any other model, and has at

present no imitators; which I wonder at, because it is at once the most easy to imitate, and the best adapted to catch mere popular applause. There is a proud, sweeping, oriental air about the acting of Young, which is very effective in the particular line of characters which it suits; but which line is very limited indeed. It is true that Young can act almost any thing *well;* but there are only a few characters which no one else can act *so* well. The gorgeous flow of his action, and the regal richness of his voice, are admirably suited to illustrate the mere external attributes of the kingly or princely estate; but they are of little note or effect in displaying or assisting the strong internal workings of mixed passion, either in its heights or its depths; they are, indeed, almost incompatible with those workings, beyond a certain degree. The merely self-witted and selfish — the purely *external* passions of pride, anger, disdain, and the like—the most prominent of those passions, or rather those impulses, which usually appertain to the character and habits of Indian caliphs and Persian satraps, are exemplified to the very life by the peculiar qualities of mind, and attributes of person, which belong to this most eloquent of declaimers. But the delicate and subtle workings which take place only in the inward recesses of the heart, and which recesses become either closed or filled up under

certain states and conditions of society, require other powers to develope them, and, indeed, other means of detecting them, than Young seems to me to possess. I do not mean to state this as a fault in the style of this actor, for I do not regard it as such. If he had possessed those qualities which he wants, he would inevitably have wanted those which he possesses; and, in that case, the English stage would have wanted, if not one of its most valuable supports, at least one of its richest ornaments; for his style is ornamental, and not the worse on that account.

Among all the canting fooleries of modern criticism, I do think there is none so ridiculous as that of finding fault with this or that subject of remark, whatever it may be, on the ground of its not possessing qualities which are, according to all human experience, absolutely incompatible with those which it does possess. Thus, English critics are perpetually lamenting over Shakespeare's want of a learned education; as if, supposing him to have had one, he would have been Shakespeare! If it were worth while to speculate about a subject on which no conclusion *can* be arrived at, I think this would furnish an admirable occasion. Certainly a very interesting, if not a very instructive treatise, might be written, *to shew what all our men of genius might have been, if they had not been*

what they were! But would it not have required the genius of them all united to have written such a treatise!

I cannot help thinking what a sensation Young would have created, had he belonged to the French instead of the English stage. With a voice almost as rich, powerful, and sonorous as that of Talma—action more free, flowing, graceful, and various—a more expressive face, and a better person,—he would have been hardly second in favour and attraction to that grandest of living actors. As it is, he admirably fills up that place on the English stage, which would have been a blank without him.

V. S.

LETTER XX.

FINALLY, I will notice the vehement, the intense, the far-thoughted, the deep-toned Macready. Although this person's acting is, for the present, confined for the most part to high tragedy, I should guess that he is by far the most universal actor on the English stage; the one who can perform the greatest number of characters in the best manner. But those which he would most excel in are undoubtedly such as require the rarest natural gifts, and the most peculiar attributes and acquirements. Being engaged at the rival house to that to which Kean belongs, he performs most of that actor's favourite parts; and he performs most of them admirably well; but unquestionably all his performances of characters which Kean has played are inferior to that wonderful actor's representations of the same. On the other hand, and this it is that proves the originality of his genius, he plays

several characters which Kean has not played, but which, though they are well adapted to his powers, Kean could certainly not play better, if so well. I mention this, because I am inclined to suppose that the mixture of the purely natural, which exists in the style of Macready, is the result of a (perhaps unconscious) general imitation, or rather adoption, of Kean's style. And in fact, as the fine perceptions of Macready could not fail to appropriate the peculiarities of that style, and enable him to appreciate its admirable force and truth of effect, *not* to have adopted it in a degree, would have argued, in a young actor like him, a paltry and mean-spirited envy, quite incompatible with that zealous love for the profession which is one of the surest evidences of a natural ability to excel in it.

Kean and Macready are, in fact, disciples of Nature herself; and accordingly they place absolute confidence in the impulses and revelations which come to their senses from that inner shrine which she has erected in the depths of their own hearts; so that some of the very best parts of their finest efforts may be regarded, not as necessary results of art, but as purely arbitrary emanations of a power which they endeavour to direct in its course, but not to create, or even to controul. They place their entire trust in Nature; modestly

and wisely believing that she knows how to accomplish her own work better than they can teach her: and these are the kind of votaries which she loves, and never deceives or deserts.

Macready has a person, commanding, but not well formed; his face is also defective in the power of eliciting high or deep expression, and is in every possible respect unfitted for the purposes required of it: and yet, strange as it may seem, these remarkable deficiencies are scarcely seen during his performances,—so vivid and intense is the operation of passion throughout every other part of his frame, and so skilfully does he avail himself of the astonishingly varied power of his noble and unrivalled voice. This power enables him at times to pour forth such tumultuous rushes—such overwhelming bursts of passion—that the very air about him seems to receive a stir and impulse from them, and, as it were, to ferment and boil,—as the light, or rather as the darkness seems to do, when we close our eyes during a sleepless night, under the influence of a feverish heat in the blood.

There is another quality of Macready's acting, which contributes to make it more generally effective than any thing else would; and a quality which is happily more infectious than any other: I mean a burning enthusiasm, a fervent spirit of

youth, which seems to pervade all the operations of his mind. He seems deeply in earnest in every thing he does; and this generates an earnestness in the spectator which nothing else can.

Finally, from what I have seen of the public performances of this accomplished actor, I am induced to think that he most happily and uniquely combines together, the enthusiasm of the artist, the judgment of the critic, the taste of the gentleman and scholar, and the active and genuine passions and feelings of the natural man.

It is not my intention to tell you any thing of the English comic actors, partly because I think them totally inferior to our own in every separate department, except in one, consisting of a broad, coarse, low humour, which we do not possess at all, and should not understand or relish if we did; but chiefly because I do not think that a foreigner, visiting a country for a limited period, can gain any very true or distinct notions on a subject in which so much depends on those mere colloquial phrases, allusions, and habits of thought and feeling, in which he cannot be supposed fully to participate: at least I feel that this is the case with me. I shall therefore just mention a few other of the English actresses, (particularly the singers), and then close my remarks on this subject.

In pure comedy, or what is called here *genteel* comedy,—which merely means comedy as distinguished from farce—nature and society, as distinguished from pleasant caricatures of them,—the English are even more deficient than we are. They have not one actress of surpassing talent, like Mars; —I had almost applied the word *genius* to that most exquisite actress; but it probably never yet existed in a woman; its place in her nature is usurped by a something still better. But the English, like ourselves, have many actresses who possess an agreeable and spirited mediocrity. The very best of these is Mrs. Davison; who, indeed, leaves the others so far behind, that I am almost disposed to assign her a station in the class above that at the head of which I have placed her.

There are only two other female performers whose names I shall mention;—Miss Kelly, and Miss Stephens, a singer. The former of these ladies possesses a degree of talent which probably equals that of Mars, though it is generally exerted in a very different way. By this she has raised herself from the humblest walks of the drama to the very head of a peculiar class of it—that class which, whether deservedly or not, has been of late years so popular, both here and in France:—the serious Melo-drama. Whatever we may think

of the value of such exhibitions as those to which I allude, there can be no doubt of the very extraordinary powers which this lady displays in them. In such characters as Annette, in the *Pie Voleuse*, she moves and agitates the audience nearly as much (though in a different way) as Talma and Kean do in high tragedy. I very much doubt the value of this species of excitation; or rather, I do not at all doubt that it is, generally speaking, extremely mischievous; but the powers which are required to produce it are not on that account the less admirable in themselves. The characteristic of Miss Kelly's acting is exquisite and intense sensibility, directed and kept in order by rare and admirable good sense. She perpetually touches upon the very extreme confines of Nature, without ever overstepping them. In fact, Nature—pure, unmingled, unsophisticated, unassisted Nature—is her only art. In the secondary walks of comedy, too, Nature stands her in stead of every thing else. Indeed, whatever she does she is always delightful, because her acting is always the very antithesis of affectation,—that crying sin—that presiding demon of the modern stage.

The last English performer I shall mention is Miss Stephens; and I shall couple her name with

that of another English singer, who attends the concerts only: I mean Mrs. Salmon.

It is difficult to speak of an object newly presented to any one of the senses, without comparing it to something with which that sense had previously been familiar; but I find it still more difficult to liken the impressions I receive from the singing of these two persons to any other remembered impressions whatever. Sages and philosophers may say or think what they will to the contrary, but I must believe that the highest enjoyment of which the human faculties are susceptible, is to be derived from such singing as that of which I am speaking. You will easily believe me when I say, that this is not a thoughtless and extravagant assertion, made only to be forgotten, but the deliberate conviction of one accustomed to seek for delight wherever it is to be found, and to examine and weigh his own feelings, and compare them with those of other people, before he determines their relative value, as a means of enabling him to form a settled judgment. You will, of course, not mistake me. The pleasures derived from musical sound, of whatever kind, are purely sensual; and as such they are only transient, and not to be distinctly remembered or recurred to; but while they endure, they equal, if not surpass, any others. The

breathings of the shepherd's flute in the distant mountains—the liquid lapses of the summer stream, lingering among its beloved pebbles—the half-suppressed murmur of the stock-dove, mingling with the sighs of the dying breeze, and the whispers of the leaves—the exulting hymn of the sky-lark, as it mounts upward in search of the unrisen sun—the voluptuous love-song of the nightingale, poured forth beneath the listening moon,—pale with listening—the fancied sound of the honey-dew as it reluctantly distils from the leaves of night-flowers:—a remembered alternation of each of these, or a blending and interfusion of them altogether, could not equal the divinely-human voice of Miss Stephens, breathing forth a simple Scottish melody, or the unearthly sweetness of Mrs. Salmon's, clinging with "reluctant amorous delay" round an air of Haydn or Mozart. They infuse into the frame that delightful languor, that voluptuous lassitude, which is feigned to come over the spell-bound votaries in the fairy-tale, when first they enter the enchanted palace of pleasure. They seem to breathe an atmosphere of sense around the soul, and so to mingle the functions and attributes of the one with those of the other, that we cannot distinguish or separate them. They cling about the soul till they draw it within the circle of the senses, without debasing it;

and yet so etherealise the senses, that they become elevated to a kindred with the soul, without their power being impaired. If Miss Stephens is incomparably the most delightful *stage*-singer I have ever heard, Mrs. Salmon is equal, and in some respects superior to her, as a room or concert singer. There is a deep, quiet, and voluptuous pathos about Mrs. Salmon's voice and manner, the effects of which are as resistless as they are indescribable: alternately they either lull the spirit to rest, or steep it in a rich dream of the senses, or snatch it from its fleshly prison, and lift it to a communion with the skies. If Miss Stephens never lifts us above the earth on which we live, she makes us forget that there *is* any thing above it; but Mrs. Salmon sings as we may fancy or hope that the angels in heaven will. If we could wish to think of Miss Stephens as any thing but what she is, it would still be as a mere earthly woman: perhaps a shepherdess of the golden age singing to her flocks among the hills of Arcadia. But Mrs. Salmon we can imagine as one of the immortals of ancient Greece: for instance, Diana singing love-ditties to Endymion, among the groves of Latmos. You have heard and been enraptured with Catalani's singing, but you could not be *enraptured* with that of Miss Stephens, and Mrs. Salmon. No two

things can possibly be more unlike. The one rushes at once into the blood like lightning, and makes it dance through the veins like wine; the other creeps over its surface like vapour, and mingles with and stills it, like a balmy oil. Catalani seems to sing because nature has willed her to be a wonderful singing creature, that cannot help it; but Miss Stephens and Mrs. Salmon seem to sing as if they felt a load of sweetness pressing upon their hearts, and would diffuse the overflowings of it on all things around them. The one is the outgushing of crystal water from a cleft rock, which dazzles the very eye-sight as it leaps and glitters in the sunshine; the other is an indwelling well-spring of milk and honey, the invisible steams from which seem to rise and wrap one like a garment, and press upon the half-closed eye-lids like the first vapour of sleep. M—— has just pointed out to me two passages in English poets, which are very illustrative of the different styles of these two singers. The first is from Wordsworth; and it most precisely describes the notes of Catalani: in speaking of those of the nightingale,—he says

"—— they pierce—and pierce—
Tumultuous harmony and fierce."

The singing of Miss Stephens, and Mrs. Salmon, realises the other description, in Milton's Comus:—

> " ——— It takes the prisoned soul
> And *laps it* in Elysium.—"

It is an Elysium, however, of the senses, after all.

V. S.

LETTER XXI.

My dear N——,

As I know the pleasure you take in attending to any thing connected with the Fine Arts, I shall send you a few notices on the present state of those pursuits in England: but, in reading what I write, you must not fail to remember that I make no pretensions whatever to even theoretical skill or knowledge on any of these subjects. The remarks I may be led to make will spring from no deeper source than the perhaps crude and superficial notions and feelings which come, as it were of themselves, to all those who attend to what is going forward about them, and who habituate themselves chiefly to seek, and cultivate the contemplation of, such objects as are calculated to afford general pleasure to the mind, by giving a healthful exercise and activity to the sensibility and the imagination. You will accept my remarks as any thing rather than *criticism*, in the sense in which that term is usually applied; but you may, if you please, consider them as those *natural* criticisms

which spring exclusively from feeling, and which therefore address themselves to that alone.

In saying that the Fine Arts have made nearer approaches to perfection in this country, in the present day, than they ever did at any former period of her history as a nation, I am saying very little indeed; for until within these sixty or seventy years they were in a state of comparative barbarism. They have emerged from that state now, only to reach one of graceful and elegant mediocrity. I speak this with an exception in favour of certain individual instances; but as a general proposition it is unquestionably true; and I believe it is admitted to be so by the best English critics of the day.

Under the head of Painting, England undoubtedly at present stands considerably above any of the continental nations; but they surpass her, perhaps in an equal degree, in the sister Art of Sculpture, and in Music,—Italy in both of these, and Germany in the latter. France may perhaps be said to have reached the same general point that England has in all these arts; but she cannot claim the same exceptions in favour of individual instances in either of them. In France we have no such painters as West and Turner, or even Haydon; or such sculptors as Flaxman and Chantry. In musical composers, on the other hand, we

surpass England, and yet reach to only a very moderate degree of excellence.

I shall speak of Painting first.—In the highest class of the art, that of history, England possesses one painter of distinguished talents; but I cannot think that those talents amount to what is understood, or rather what is felt, by the term genius. Perhaps they approach as near to it as they well can, without reaching it. There is a line which forms an insuperable division between the two, and which it is as easy to perceive as it is difficult, if not impossible, to describe, or to make apparent to those who do *not* perceive it. West's best pictures have all which knowledge, skill, industry, and judgment can give them; but we miss that ineffable power, which belonged to his great Italian predecessors, of moving the heart and the imagination, without our knowing how or why. In looking at and admiring his works, we can always give a reason for "the faith that is in us." We can feel that we admire this part for its grace, that for its expression, a third for its colouring, and so on; or that we approve of the whole for the skill displayed in the grouping, or the force and harmony of the general effect. But here we must stop. The magical touches and expressions, the evanescent hues of genius (evanescent but from their effects) are wanting; and nothing else

can supply their place. We cannot stand before West's pictures, and feel towards them as we do towards the works of Nature herself—as if they were effusions and emanations of *her* power and spirit. Associations connected with *Art* are perpetually intruding themselves, and interfering with those thoughts and feelings which should be occupied with any thing rather than the mechanical means by which the effects before us have been produced; for these feelings never intrude when we are contemplating natural objects and expressions, or their prototypes in the best works of the old masters. In looking at *them* we have no concern with the cause—the effect is enough for us. I am speaking, of course, of those alone who contemplate the object in question as sources of immediate pleasure, communicated through the medium of the senses and the imagination. Artists, no doubt, look at these objects with a different eye, because they look at them for different purposes; and if, on this account, they lose some of the delights which accrue to the mere spectator, they gain others, and perhaps equivalent ones, which are peculiar to themselves.

The works by which West will be distinguished hereafter as a great painter, at least among those which I have seen, are his two last; and certainly they will continue to be his last, if he knows his

own capabilities, and the kind of reputation which he deserves and has acquired. Though the works of his old age, (for he is said to be more than eighty,) they are incomparably the best efforts of his pencil, and are really very grand, vigorous, and noble productions. Still, however, I must regard them as works of Art, and no more. They display extensive knowledge, consummate practical skill, and admirable taste and judgment; but they are without the evidence of genius. By far the best of these two is that called CHRIST REJECTED: the subject of which is taken from the 13th chapter of St. Luke. It is a picture of immense size, and containing a vast number of figures, all of which are admirably employed with reference to the subject of the work; and they combine almost all the expressions of which the human countenance is susceptible, and through all their gradations—from the almost audible rage and execration of the High Priest, down to the lovely and unmoved placidity of the centurion's daughter, who hangs on her father's arm, and contemplates the scene with that best philosophy which belongs to childhood alone. The contrasts and gradations in all these expressions, and the masterly manner in which the different departments of the picture are rendered at once complete in themselves and subservient to the general effect of the whole, make it

a rich and admirable study for the mind, and one of the real triumphs of art.

West's other great picture, of Death on the Pale Horse, is intended as an illustration of a celebrated passage in the Revelations, chap. vi. It is very inferior in conception to the Christ Rejected, because the subject of it is beyond the reach of this artist's natural gifts; but there is great power in the execution of some parts of it. The personification of Death going forth to destroy, is finely executed, according to the ideal conception which the painter has formed to himself; but that conception is, in itself, totally bad. To represent Death (which is the very antithesis to humanity) under a *human* form, and wielding his dart of destruction with a human arm, is as unphilosophical as it is unpoetical.

V. S.

LETTER XXII.

HAYDON has contrived to acquire a reputation more disproportioned to the number and value of his works than any other English painter, or professor of art of any kind whatever. I'm afraid I am entitled to use the expression "contrived to acquire," in its least creditable sense, as signifying that the rank he holds in public estimation has been created and acquired by artificial means, rather than achieved by force of genius, and yielded as a natural and free-will tribute to obvious and indisputable claims. The public regard him as a great painter, not because they *feel* that he is such, from the undeniable proofs that he has given them; but because they have been disciplined into the *belief* that he is such, and because he has hitherto taken care not to do any thing that shall *disprove* the fact. For my own part, I believe that Haydon does possess very considerable talent, and that therefore he is entitled to enjoy the reputation of possessing it; but no more. I believe that he has a deep and inextinguishable love for his art; and this is

one of the very strongest of collateral proofs that he was intended to excel in it. But I do not think that he yet *has* excelled in it sufficiently to entitle him to the rank which he is said to claim for himself, and to deserve. It is on *proof* alone that real and permanent fame can be awarded to the aspirants after it, in any department of art. Now the actual proofs of genius which Haydon has hitherto given, are very inadequate to sustain and justify the reputation which his friends claim for him, and which he in fact enjoys among a certain class of the English public. It therefore follows, that that reputation is not of the right sort, and has not been acquired by means known and recognized in the ordinary practice of the art; and therefore that it is unworthy of the talent which he undoubtedly does possess, and as undoubtedly does not exercise to its true and legitimate end. He would find a "royal road" to the temple of Fame; and there is no such thing. Genius herself has enough to do to reach it by the ordinary and only road of industry, labour, and time. It is by his works alone, not by his pretensions, or even his qualifications, that the artist must seek to be known and honoured. The fame that proceeds from any thing but these is not legitimate; and illegitimate fame, like illegitimate children, proves too much. Virtue is not virtue till it is put into practice; and

genius, when it does not display itself in visible and consistent action, is, to its possessor, a curse, and to others an empty name, if not a bye-word and a mockery.

When we recollect what the old painters did to acquire the fame they enjoy, it must seem almost ridiculous, after having spoken of Haydon as an artist of distinguished reputation, to state that he has painted but *two* pictures which have any pretensions to rank as first rate works of art. One of these is the Judgment of Solomon—I believe the first picture by which he distinguished himself and became generally known; and the other is his last work, representing Christ's Entry into Jerusalem. In the first of these pictures there is a severe grandeur of style, and a calm subdued power, which are very rarely exhibited at so early an age as that at which the work must have been produced; and it was calculated to raise expectations which have, I think, not since been fulfilled; for, as far as I have been able to learn, this artist has, since that time, (more than ten years) produced almost nothing, except the picture I have mentioned above, which was exhibited last year. This picture is undoubtedly, in many respects, a very fine production: perhaps, upon the whole, one of the finest of the English school in the historical class. But it is far from being so perfect a work as his un-

discriminating admirers would have us believe. Its merits seem to me to lay much more in detail than in general character and effect; which should undoubtedly not be the case in a subject of this nature. The expressions, in many of the faces, are exceedingly fine; and I think the face of the Saviour himself is the most striking part of the picture; though in this opinion I differ from some of the most approved critics of the day. But individual expression, in a work of this kind, ought certainly to be kept in complete subordination to the general effect; and this is not the case here. There is an appropriate power and spirit pervading each individual part of the picture; but there is none which presides in a sufficiently obvious manner over the whole, *as a whole*. In delineating the face of the Saviour, the artist has hazarded the bold and dangerous measure of departing from all the ancient and established models, (for this face had become almost like a traditionary *portrait*) and has ventured to give it an entirely new, original, and, as it seems to me, more appropriate character. The attempt is considered by many as a failure; but I fully agree with those others who think it in a great degree a successful attempt to embody to the senses our ideal notion of that outward and visible symbol which is best calculated to display the mind and character of the person represented. The face

exhibits less personal beauty, and less (perhaps too little) sweetness of expression, but a much greater degree of intellectual power. There is an intense and highly poetical character about it, which nothing but high talent could have conceived or produced, and which is at once perfectly original, and appropriate.

There are three other figures introduced into this picture, the merits of which, as to the execution of them, are not disputed; but there has been much discussion as to the propriety of placing them in the situation which they occupy. These are authentic portraits of Voltaire, Sir Isaac Newton, and the living English poet Wordsworth. The French philosopher is depicted in the act of scoffing at and reviling the Saviour as he passes; the English philosopher, Newton, is contemplating the scene with calm and serious attention; and the poet is bowing down his head in token of reverence and love. That these portraits, particularly the first and last, are extremely well executed, as far as regards the expression of them, there is no doubt; and I think there is as little doubt that, *as portraits,* they are totally and preposterously out of place. The artist may, and no doubt does, shelter himself under the example of his great predecessors in the art, many of whom have occasionally introduced

portraits of themselves or their friends in a similar manner. But I imagine these were never introduced *as* portraits, and announced as such; but merely as vehicles, equally appropriate with any others, for the expressions wished to be conveyed. They have been discovered to be portraits, or handed down to us as such; but their *likeness* to the originals was never, as it is here, intended to be an essential and component part of the subject.

V. S.

LETTER XXIII.

Sir Thomas Lawrence presents a striking example of the perverse and baneful effects of the turn which modern patronage has taken in this country. If his genius had been suffered or encouraged to take its natural course, he would probably have been the first historical painter of his day; as it is, he is no more than the first portrait painter;—and the difference between the two is as wide as between the mere copyist, and the inventor and creator. Those who are acquainted with the portraits of Titian, Rembrandt, and Vandyke, will not deny that high genius may be very successfully displayed in this line of the art; but that genius should be absolutely *confined* to this line—as that of Sir Thomas Lawrence is—must be considered as a great and lamentable misuse and degradation of its powers. But I'm afraid it is only in behalf of the world, not of the painter, that this complaint can be made. He, it must be confessed, has, in the mere worldly sense of the phrase, "chosen the better part." He gets

his hundred or hundred and fifty guineas for a portrait, that it requires no previous study to prepare himself for, and that he can begin and finish in a week; — whereas, if he had directed his talents, great as they are, to historical painting, he might have studied for months beforehand, to qualify himself for the treatment of a particular subject; have employed months more in the treatment of it; and at the end, when he saw his work completed, he might have wasted his time, and broken his spirit, in going about to seek a purchaser for it, at a price just sufficient, perhaps, to afford him subsistence during the time he was occupied about it.

I dare say Sir Thomas Lawrence has, by this time, fully persuaded himself that he has hit on the right path to fortune and preferment; and so he has in one sense: but it is probable that, before he arrived at this happy conclusion, his genius and interest had many hard struggles together which should gain the mastery.

Sir Thomas Lawrence is unquestionably, and without any comparison, the first portrait painter of the age. He has a masterly power of seizing and fixing the characteristic expression of the heads he paints, which has never been surpassed. And if he infuses a less intense and intellectual character into them than we find in those of Titian,

it is probably because he finds less of this in his originals. On this point I am willing to impute the blame to nature,—or to that state of society which has changed and deteriorated her in this respect,—not to any want of skill and genius in the artist.

I believe Sir Thomas Lawrence has not, since he first acquired distinction as a portrait painter, produced one work of original composition. If this be true, it is a very remarkable, and perhaps unique instance, of real genius selling itself once for all to the slavery of interest, and never afterwards swerving from the road which *that* has pointed out to it. Has this artist's genius become so reined and disciplined to its dull duty of travelling along the *iron-railway* of portrait painting, that it is never tempted to wander into the "primrose paths" of intellect and poetry? Or has it, occasionally and in secret, stepped into those paths, and found that their flowery temptations are not to be indulged in, without paying a higher price for them in hard money than he thinks they are worth? Or has his spirit become so subdued to the quality of its occupation, that it cannot if it would, and would not if it could, change it for any other?

Whichever of these causes it may be that keeps this distinguished artist from employing his genius

in a line of art more worthy of its powers and acquirements, all the world have cause to lament and complain of it; not excepting those whose dull or foolish faces it has contributed to multiply, and keep a few years longer from that oblivion for which they were made.

V. S.

LETTER XXIV.

THERE is an English painter named Martin, who has, within these very few years, started up at once from obscurity to a distinguished reputation. And in fact he possesses powers of a very rare and singular kind; but I am inclined to think that they are, at present, not so valuable as they are rare. His forte consists, or at least it has hitherto shewn itself almost exclusively, in depicting the various effects of *light*, under its different combinations and modifications. Light seems to be the element to which his genius is native, and in which it lives. Whatever it employs itself about, is made subservient to the developement and exhibition of some of the modes and qualities of that wonderful power. And certainly, in this very confined sphere, it has produced some masterly and astonishing effects. The three or four pictures that I have seen by this artist, though disfigured by numerous defects, are undoubtedly very striking and extraordinary works, and could not have been produced without considerable knowledge

in a certain department of the art, and a degree of natural talent amounting to genius. But I'm afraid they shew that that knowledge has been sought, and that talent directed, too exclusively with a view to produce merely striking and novel effects; and while this is the case, the artist cannot hope to gain that steady and enduring reputation, which he may deserve and acquire by a proper and judicious discipline of his natural powers, and a simple and sincere study of nature and art, under their simplest and least uncommon forms and aspects.

The picture of this artist by which I have been particularly struck, and which is said to be the best he ever painted, is his last, which is shewn now in London as a separate exhibition. It is called Belshazzar's Feast; and exhibits the celebrated scripture story of the hand-writing on the wall. The scene in which the event is supposed to take place, is very grandly and powerfully conceived. The richness and splendor of the festal preparations, the countless number of the guests, the superb massiveness of the architecture, and the immense extent of the halls—which is made apparent by a most skilful application of the rules of perspective; these, added to the view of the Hanging Gardens seen above the walls of the building, and the Temple of Belus and

Tower of Babel, reaching up into the clouds in the misty distance, produce, on the first glance which we take at the picture, a very fine and appropriate effect on the imagination, which is called upon to take part in the awful scene that is acting.

When we turn more immediately to the scene itself, we observe that every part of it is acted upon and modified by the supernatural appearance which is supposed at that instant to have issued from the wall of the palace. Every inanimate object that we see is passively influenced by it, and every human agent is actively exhibiting its effects in a variety of ways, according to their respective characters and situations. This gives a dramatic unity of effect to every part of the work, which is one of the most difficult achievements of art, and one of the most powerful and poetical when achieved. The rays proceeding from the characters of light cover the whole left side of the picture; their intense effulgence almost extinguishing, and as it were devouring, the details of the architecture, and the figures of the guests who are assembled in that part of the scene. Opposite to this is the terrified monarch, who has quitted his throne, with the queen, and the persons immediately about them. In the centre is the Prophet Daniel, who has been sent for to interpret the writing. All

the other parts of the picture are occupied with persons in motion, under the immediate influence of the different feelings excited in them by the supernatural appearance. I repeat, the general impression arising from this scene, as a whole, is produced with wonderful skill; and its effect is highly poetical and fine: but, when we come to examine the details, numerous and very gross faults present themselves. The figures, considered singly, are almost all either ill-drawn, awkward, extravagant, affected, or theatrical. There is no simple nature, no character, no passion, in any of them. In the detail of inanimate objects there are, also, two or three parts which have been greatly admired, without, as I think, at all deserving it. The means which the architect has employed to shew the high polish on the porphyry, of which the floors, &c. are supposed to be constructed, is ingenious enough; viz. by making the floor cast a vivid reflection of the jewelled cup which has fallen from the hand of the terrified king; but he has forgotten to make it cast a reflection from any thing else but this individual object! The effect, too, which the blazing characters are made to produce on the lights in the seven-branched candlestick of the temple would have been a mere conceit, if it had not been a mere mistake. The candlestick is placed

just above the throne of the monarch, on the opposite side of the hall to that on which the characters appear; and the light in each branch of the candlestick is made to increase in brightness as it recedes from the front of the picture. But in fact the single blazing character which is opposite to the candlestick, is equally opposite to the whole of the seven lights as to any one of them; and whatever effect the other characters, which run all along the wall of the building, might have produced on the set of lights placed at the hither extremity of the opposite wall, would evidently, under the circumstances, have been directly contrary to that which they exhibit. If there had been any visible difference in the appearance of the seven lights, that nearest to the spectator of the picture would have been the brightest rather than the faintest. I should probably not have been led to notice these two oversights at all, much less to mention them, if they had not (and particularly the last) been pointed out as strokes of genius.

There is no doubt that this artist has been gifted with a very powerful and poetical imagination; and nothing is wanting but deep and various study, and practice in a more extended sphere than that in which he has hitherto moved, to enable him to turn it to a very fine account. Without these, his pictures may possess beauties

which few will be able to appreciate, or will admire after their novelty has gone off; and still fewer will be able to rival or imitate: but they will always stand a chance of being disfigured by faults so gross and obvious, that the most ignorant will feel and be able to point them out.

V. S.

LETTER XXV.

THE chief ornament of the English school of art, and perhaps the greatest of living painters, is Turner. His chief pictures may be ranked generally under the head of historical landscapes; and they display an originality of style, and a power of producing grand and striking effects from apparently inadequate causes, which are the sure marks of genius, and which have rarely been equalled, and never surpassed, in the same line of the art. Though Turner usually gives an historical character to his landscapes, by introducing into them the actors in some traditional event, yet he always keeps this part of his work subservient to the display of some of the striking effects of natural objects, either in the beautiful, the sublime, the grand, or the terrific. His genius seems to luxuriate amidst the forms and attributes of external nature alone; to repose on *them* as the only objects worthy of its special attention and contemplation;—permitting itself to dwell on man, and his actions and affairs, only when they happen

to have been in some way or other connected with her mighty workings. All his finest pictures seem to me to be an illustration of this remark. On the contrary, those in which he has introduced too much of man, and his actions and creations—making them predominant over nature—have been comparative failures. He has painted the passage of Hannibal over the Alps—not for the purpose of adding to our conceptions of the wonders of that achievement, but to display the sublimities of that nature with which Hannibal was contending. He shews the mighty army of the conqueror, not when it is preparing to descend on the plains which it was to ravage and subjugate, but when it was itself half subjugated and destroyed by a snow-shower—by a few flakes of feathery sleet, thrown in its face, as if in scorn, by the hand of omnipotent nature! He has painted the Universal Deluge—not for the purpose of exhibiting the human horrors attendant on that event, but to aggrandize that power which caused it. It is the scene itself that creates those feelings of terror and dismay which attend the sight of this work, not the sympathy arising from the sight of that terror and dismay which the event itself is represented as having actually caused. These observations may be extended to many others of his finest works. On the other hand,

his picture of Rome as seen from a balcony of the Vatican, though dazzling and splendid in its general effect, is far from being characteristic of the scene it represents. Man and his works were too predominant here for the genius of the painter to be at ease among them. Not being able to prevent itself from wandering into a contemplation of the power which had produced the "Eternal City," it could not brook the comparison, and almost the rivalship, which seemed to suggest themselves between man and nature. The same remark is in some degree applicable to his extraordinary picture of Richmond Hill. The scene, with all the ineffable light of its beauty, is too artificial for Turner's purely natural genius to feel itself at home there.

The remark may be childish perhaps, but I cannot help making it, that in looking at the wonderfully natural effects produced by many parts of Turner's pictures when viewed from their proper point of distance, and then going close up to the picture, and seeing the mechanical means by which those effects are produced, one cannot avoid being struck with astonishment at their apparent inadequacy. But I think it must be admitted that, while this is an evident proof of the painter's genius, and his profound knowledge of the art, yet it is, as far as it goes, a characteristic fault of

his style, rather than a subject for commendation,—as I find it is sometimes made by this artist's friends. These are not the means by which Nature and Claude produce similar effects. The objects in their pictures *look* beautiful because they *are* so. The closer we examine into *them*, the more matter we find for delight and admiration. A picture may be more extraordinary, but it cannot be more valuable, for being in fact unlike what it seems and professes to be like. The standard of perfection in art must be sought for in nature, and it will be sought for in vain any where else; and it is not thus that nature works. She is no less careful in the finishing of detail than she is in the production of general effect. In fact, it is precisely by the finish of her details, that her general effects are produced; and it is in the same way that they should be produced in art; which fails in fulfilling its legitimate purposes whenever it fails in imitating its only legitimate prototype. This dashing, and, no doubt, very convenient facility of Mr. Turner's pencil, may be passed over as a fault that may be forgiven; but it cannot be regarded as a merit that should be held up for admiration and imitation.

Y. S.

LETTER XXVI.

I HAVE now to speak of one of the most distinguished artists, in his particular line, that this or any other country ever possessed. For my own part, I think him, without exception, the most so. He has, to be sure, produced but few pictures; but in force and richness of expression, in truth and depth of character, in subtlety of thought, and felicity of invention, I have seen none in the same class that at all equal these few. In the above particulars, and in a marvellous truth and simplicity of pencil in delineating what he sees or remembers, Wilkie as far surpasses Teniers himself, as Teniers surpasses him in freedom and facility of touch, and freshness, transparency, and beauty of colouring. And important as these latter qualities are in a picture, those which spring from, and appeal to, the intellect chiefly, must be allowed to be still more so. The subject of Wilkie's pictures are confined to what may be called the higher classes of low life, where the habits and institutions of modern society have

hitherto, in a great measure, failed to diffuse that artificial and conventional form of character, which, if it does not altogether preclude the *action* of the feelings, at least forbids all outward manifestation of them. If this artist had unfortunately devoted his peculiar and unrivalled power of depicting what *is*, to scenes in high, or even in middle life, he would have produced works altogether feeble and worthless; because he can only represent what actually exists; and, in these classes of life, *this*, as far as regards its outward attributes, is smoothed and polished down to a plain and colourless surface, which will not admit the passage of any thing from within, and from which every thing without slides off like water-drops from the feathers of a bird. Only think of making a picture of a party of *ladies and gentlemen* assembled to hear a piece of political news read; or of the same persons listening to a solo on the violin by an eminent professor! It would doubtless be the most *fàde* affair in the world. And yet these are the subjects of Wilkie's Village Politicians, and his Blind Fiddler; two of the most interesting and perfect works that ever proceeded from the pencil; and which at once evince in the artist, and excite in the spectator, more activity of thought, and play of sentiment, than are called forth at all the fashionable parties of Paris and London for a whole season.

Wilkie's power is confined, as I have said, to the representation of what he sees; but he selects and combines this with such admirable judgment, and represents it with such unrivalled truth and precision, that his pictures impress themselves on the memory with all the force and reality of facts. We remember, and recur to, the scenes he places before us, just as we should to the real scenes if we had been present at them; and can hardly think of, and refer to them as any thing *but* real scenes. They seem to become part of our experience—to increase the stores of our actual knowledge of life and human nature; and the actors in them take their places among the persons we have seen and known in our intercourse with the living world. His pictures are, in one sense of the term, the most *national* that were ever painted; and will carry down to posterity the face, character, habits, costume, &c. of the period and class which they represent, in a way that nothing else ever did or could: for they are literally the things themselves—the truth, and nothing but the truth. The painter allows himself no liberty or licence in the minutest particulars. He seems to have a superstitious reverence for the truth; and would no more *paint* a lie than he would tell one. I suppose he has never introduced an article of dress or furniture into any one of his pictures, that he had not

actually seen worn or used under the circumstances he was representing. If he had occasion to paint a peasant who had just entered his cottage on a rainy day, he would, as a matter of conscience, leave the marks of his dirty footsteps on the threshhold of the door! This scrupulous minuteness of detail, which would be the bane of some classes of art, is the beauty of his, coupled, and made subservient, as it is, to the most curious, natural, and interesting developement of character, sentiment, and thought.

But the most extraordinary examples of this artist's professional skill, are those in which he has depicted some peculiar *expression* in the face and action of some one of his characters. The quantity and degree of expression that he has, in several of these instances, thrown into the compass of a face and figure of less than the common miniature size, is not to be conceived without being seen, and has certainly never before been equalled in the art. His most extraordinary efforts of this kind are two, in which the expressions are not very agreeable, but which become highly interesting, on account of the extreme difficulty that is felt to have been overcome in the production of them. One of these is an old man, in the act of coughing violently; and the other is a child, who has cut its finger.

But if this is the most extraordinary part of Wilkie's pictures, and the part most likely to at-

tract vulgar attention and curiosity, it is far from being the most valuable and characteristic. If it were, I should not regard him as the really great artist which I now do. The mere overcoming of difficulty, for the sake of overcoming it, and without producing any other ulterior effect, would be a mere idle waste of time and skill, and quite unworthy either praise or attention. It is, in these particular instances which I have noticed above, as in numerous others in different lines of art, a mere sleight of hand, exceedingly curious, as exhibiting the possible extent of human skill, but no more. In Wilkie's pictures, this exhibition of mere manual skill is used very sparingly, and is almost always kept in subjection to, or brought in aid of, other and infinitely more valuable ends. With the single exception of the "Cut Finger," which is a mere gratuitous effort of this manual dexterity, all his pictures are moral tales, more or less interesting, from their perfectly true delineation of habits and manners, or impressive, from their developement of character, passion, and sentiment. The "Opening of the Will" is as fine, in this way, as one of the Scotch novels; and the "Rent Day" includes a whole series of national tales on English pastoral life in the nineteenth century.

It is a great mistake to consider Wilkie as a *comic* painter, in which light he is generally re-

garded by the public here. When they are standing before his pictures, they seem to feel themselves bound to be moved to laughter by them, as they would by a comedy or a farce; and without this, they think they do not shew their taste: whereas laughter seems to me to be the very last sensation these works are adapted to call forth. Speaking of the best and most characteristic of them, I would say, that scarcely any compositions of the art, in whatever class, are calculated to excite a greater variety of deep and serious feelings; feelings, it is true, so uniformly tempered and modified by a calm and delightful satisfaction, that they can scarcely be entertained without calling up a *smile* to the countenance. But the smile arising from inward delight, is as different from the laughter excited by strangeness and drollery, as any one thing can be from another. It is, in fact, the very essence of Wilkie's pictures, that there is literally nothing strange, and consequently nothing droll and laughter-moving, about them. I confess, that from the works of no one English artist have I received so much pure and unmixed pleasure and instruction, as I have from those of David Wilkie.

V. S.

LETTER XXVII.

England is so rich in painters of a class somewhat, though but little, inferior to those I have already described to you, that I must not venture to speak of them much in detail. It would, however, be doing them great injustice, and be giving you a very imperfect notion of the present state of the art, if I did not mention the names and characteristics of some of those English painters who have obtained, and who deserve, a very considerable degree of eminence. Perhaps I ought to have included Fuseli, Hilton, Howard, Northcote, Stothard, Westall, Callcot, Mulready, and two or three others, among those of whom I have spoken at length in my former letters, for they all possess characteristics peculiarly their own; but this would occupy more time than I find I can afford to the subject; and besides, I do not think that any of the above-named artists possess talents amounting to genius. Their pictures display, in their different lines, infinite taste, spirit, and clever-

ness; but they are not works of surpassing power or originality, that will carry down to posterity the names of their creators, when they themselves, from the nature of the materials of which they are composed, are, like those creators, mingled with the dust.

Fuseli is a painter of a very singular and original style; but it seems to me to be an originality not founded on any true principles of art, and not producing any valuable results; and therefore not entitled to be regarded as that genuine originality, which is the surest proof and consequence of real genius. His style is original, only in so far as it is different from that of any other artist. A person who had never seen one of Fuseli's pictures, but who had heard a tolerably accurate description of his style, might be taken into a collection, no matter how extensive or various, and, if it contained a single picture by this artist, he would inevitably point it out at first sight. He would only have to look for something bearing no resemblance, either in form, colouring, or expression, to any thing else in either nature or in art; and when he had found such a one, he might safely pronounce *that* to be a picture by Fuseli.

As this artist is very highly thought of by what are considered the best authorities in this country, I am not a little doubtful as to the accuracy of

my taste and judgment in this particular. But if it were not for knowing this to be the case, I should consider his works as a mass of mere impertinence, extravagance, foppery, and affectation; embodying all the ridiculous and disgusting *diablerie* of the German school of poetry, without any of its delicacy of sentiment, subtlety of thought, or power of imagination. Whatever subject he paints, his colours consist of about four different shades of green mud; and his forms, in whatever action they are engaged, look as if they had been broken on the wheel, or were undergoing that operation. There is, I assure you, very little exaggeration in this account of Fuseli's works: but I suppose there is something in them that I am not able to appreciate or discover; for I'm told that they frequently excite very general admiration, or the semblance and pretence of it, which is now-a-days much the same thing. I am, however, perfectly sincere in saying, that I suppose there is something in this artist's works which I am not able to discover; for he is said to possess a better knowledge of the principles of his art than any man in England; and he has for many years been Professor of Painting at the Royal Academy. However this may be, it is but fair to mention, that he is an expatriated German; and there is something a little symptomatic of quackery in that. I should, at all

events, not be surprised if, at no very distant day, his inventions should come to be ranked with those of Mesmer, Gall, Feinagle, &c.

Stothard has long enjoyed the reputation of having a truer feeling for what is graceful in form than any other artist of his day; and if nothing but this were wanting to constitute an accomplished painter, he might claim that title. But there is a feeble, and what the English call a dawdling character, about most of his figures, and a flaunting slovenliness in his colouring, which is extremely distasteful to an eye pleased and accustomed to repose on the simple modes and attributes of nature alone. But Stothard, like Fuseli, enjoys a very distinguished reputation among the members of his own profession; so that I suppose he also has beauties which are too recondite to be discovered or relished by unlearned eyes. I should mention, however, that I judge merely from having seen his smaller and less studied pictures. Some larger ones,—in which he has depicted character and expression,—I have not been able to get a sight of. There is one, in particular, illustrating a poem by a celebrated early English poet, called the Procession of the Canterbury Pilgrims. In this, if I may judge from the plate which has been engraved of it, there is much vigour of conception, variety of character and expression, and infi-

nite spirit and grace in the forms and grouping; whether there is an equal degree of appropriateness and truth, I am not able to judge, for the work from which the picture is taken, has, on account of its age, and the consequent change in the language and orthography, become almost unintelligible to me.

The next painter I shall mention, is Richard Westall. There is something extremely *taking* in this artist's style. He is a mere mannerist; as much so as Fuseli is; and seems to have nearly as little respect for the simplicities of actual nature. But there is this difference between them; the one is an agreeable mannerist, and the other a disgusting one. Neither of their muses can claim an alliance with nature; for the one is a graceful sylph of the air, while the other is a gnome, or demon, priding itself on its ugliness, and vaunting it as the only beauty. Westall's forms, characters, and expressions, are not to be found in nature, it is true; but if they were to be found there, we should admire and love them. If his elegant exaggerations tend to pamper the taste, and give it an unhealthful and mischievous fastidiousness, they at least do not outrage the feelings, and insult the common sense. All his characters have a theatrical air about them: they are heroes and heroines of romance. If he had to represent the most common-

place incident of common life, he would throw an air of unnatural refinement over it, which must, I should think, find very little sympathy in the plain sense and unsophisticated feelings of his countrymen. He has a *tasty* manner of doing every thing, which would be likely to find a host of admirers in France, but which seems little adapted to the sturdy simplicity of English habits and character; and yet I find that he is very popular here, particularly as an illustrator of poetry, and works of fiction,—a branch of the art which is at present carried to an extravagant and ridiculous extent in this country. No popular work can make its appearance, without being almost immediately followed by a series of engravings, illustrative of its most striking characters and events. I am afraid this indicates any thing rather than the general diffusion of a vigorous and healthful taste, either in literature or art.

It is difficult to fancy a more direct contrast to the style of Westall, than that of Callcot. As a painter of landscape, and external nature, he is exactly what Wilkie is as a painter of character and common life; except that Callcot has more freedom of hand, and is a better colourist than Wilkie. I do not mean, that he displays as much genius in the one line as Wilkie does in the other; for even if he may be supposed to *possess* as much, the

nature of his subjects do not admit of its display, or rather they have not the power of calling it forth. But his genius is exactly of the same *kind* as Wilkie's; it possesses the same power of discovering the essential characteristics of what it contemplates, and the same skill in delineating them in all their freshness, vigour and truth. In this respect, Callcot's talent is fully entitled to the name of genius. He differs from all the great old masters in the same line; and has I think more vigour of pencil, and more natural and characteristic truth of expression than any one of them. His style cannot, indeed, be said to possess the airy and enchanting graces of Claude, or the classic power and beauty of the Poussins, or the delicious sweetness of Paul Potter, or the sunny brightness of Wynants, or the elegant warmth of Both, or the delightfully rural and countryfied air of Hobbima. In fact he has no peculiar or distinguishing style of *his own;* and this is his great and characteristic beauty. There is nothing in his pictures but what belongs positively and exclusively to the scene they profess to represent. When any of the above qualities are required in his pictures, they are sure to be found there: not because they are part of *his* style, but because they are part of *Nature's*, in the circumstances under which he is representing her. The *artist* never obtrudes himself, to share with Nature

the admiration of the spectator. And this is a very rare and admirable quality to possess, in these days of pretence and affectation; when *subject* is usually but a secondary consideration, and is kept in subservience to the display of style, manner, and what is called *effect*.

There are several other English painters whom I ought to describe to you, as being nearly as well entitled to attention as some of the above; but I find I must now close my list, by merely mentioning their names, and the line of art in which they chiefly employ their efforts.

Hilton, Howard, Thomson, Glover, Northcote,* and Singleton, though neither of them possess much vigour or originality of style, have each produced some very charming and elegant compositions, replete with poetical taste, fancy and feeling; and if they know the real nature of value of their respective acquirements and pretensions, they will confine their efforts to subjects which require no more than these qualities.

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* If my friend had heard this gentleman *talk*, (as he says he did Mr. Coleridge, see a subsequent letter,) we should probably not have had his name passed over silently, as it is now. If painters were to take rank according to their talk, (as he seems to think poets should) Mr. Northcote would long since have been elected president of the Royal Academy by acclamation. His talk is the most classical thing in modern times.—Tr.

Phillips, Shee, Beechy, Owen, and Jackson, are very clever and accomplished portrait painters, and I believe they employ themselves almost exclusively in this line of the art; for the productions of which there is a most extraordinary demand, in a nation which prides itself on its freedom from personal vanity!

Collins and Bigg have painted some delightful pieces on subjects connected with rural life, which breathe the very air and spirit of the country; Mulready and Rippengill have followed in the path marked out by Wilkie, and have produced some very pleasing and meritorious works; and upon the whole, I cannot help admitting that the art of painting in England may perhaps be considered to have reached as high a point of excellence, as it is ever likely to reach, during our present over-refined state of society and manners.

V. S.

LETTER XXVIII.

I AM glad it so happened that I had not an opportunity of seeing Sir J. Leicester's collection of the works of English artists, till I had written you nearly all I had to say on this subject; for if I had taken his exquisite collection as a criterion to judge by, I believe I should have been led to give you a more favourable, but perhaps not so just an account, of the general state of the art in England. This collection is small, but it has evidently been selected with great taste and judgment; and besides the works of living artists, it contains a few very exquisite specimens by the founders of the present English school,—Sir Joshua Reynolds, Wilson, Romney, Gainsborough, Loutherbourg, &c. Indeed the English school is of so very recent a date altogether, that nearly the whole of these artists may be considered as belonging to the present day. But perhaps, upon the whole, it would be decided that the best pictures in this collection, except one by Turner, are those *not* painted by living artists: and in this, as well as its extent, the gallery has rather disappointed me; for I had

taken up a notion that it was one at which might be gained a general idea of the *present* state of the art in England; whereas it does not contain a single picture by the majority of those living artists who now divide the public favour.

From his pictures in this collection, and by the few that I have happened to see elsewhere, I am not able to give an adequate idea of the style and merits of the celebrated Sir Joshua Reynolds,—the founder of the English school, and who still, up to this day, is considered as standing at the head of it. But here is one picture of his which includes a more intense expression of female beauty—not ideal, but real, living, breathing beauty—than any thing I have ever seen. It is a single head, but not a portrait. There is also a sleeping Venus, by Hoppner, (an artist who died lately) which is the very best piece of colouring I have seen, of the English school. As a Venus, the picture is nothing, for it is entirely without an appropriate mental expression; but as an example of finely coloured flesh, it is equal to some of the best specimens of the old masters. The upper part of the figure seems to me most happily to blend the glowing warmth of Rubens with the miraculous handling of Titian; the flesh is more *alive* than that of the first of these great artists, and more richly tinted than that of the last. But I'm afraid I am here

venturing beyond my safe soundings: these are delicate points, on which an eye directed by mere feeling should perhaps not dare to decide. There is a picture by Gainsborough in this collection, which is said to be one of the finest he ever painted; and it is indeed an exquisite work. It is called the "Cottage Door," and represents one of those scenes of deep rural seclusion which are purely and exclusively *English.* It is a peasant's cottage, completely shut in and embowered by foliage; and it conveys to me—to whom the scene is so entirely new—the idea of a bird's nest, rather than the abode of a human family; for, with us, such a family would be found occupying a dwelling as large as that in which I am now living. The mother and children are standing before the door of the cottage, and form a very charming and characteristic group; except that there is an air of refinement and elegance about the mother, which, as a general character, is quite inconsistent with the scene, but which I have more than once observed belonging to females in that class of life on the continent, though I should never have expected to find it here. There is also a picture in this collection, by Loutherbourg, an artist who died a few years ago, which deserves particular notice. It represents an avalanche falling among the higher Alps. The whole still life part of this scene, if it can be called so, is very admirably con-

ceived and executed. The motion of the descending fragments—crashing and thundering down the ravine—is given in a very extraordinary manner; and the whole scene, except the figures, which are indifferent, is managed with great truth of effect.

Among the paintings by living artists, perhaps the finest is a sun-light scene by Turner. It is a sea view, and is painted with prodigious power and effect. The scene itself displays no peculiar attraction of any kind; and yet the picture seizes and fixes the attention the moment you look at it; and it *will* not be forgotten. It represents the sun, which is the centre point of the picture, bursting through a mist, and dispelling it away in all directions. The scene is on the Dutch coast, and includes some boats and fishermen. These are coloured with great truth and richness, and it is remarkable that several of the figures are literal copies from Teniers. In fact it is only when Turner *copies* figures, that he makes them like any thing that ever was. I am afraid there is a little affectation in this; unless there is a little quackery, which is worse. I am the more disposed to think that one or other, if not both, of these may be the case, by another picture of this artist's in the present collection. It is a blacksmith's shop, in which the figures are evidently copied from real life, and most richly and admirably coloured. The artist's

taste and good sense no doubt informed him that, from the nature of both these subjects, truth of character was indispensable to the figures employed in them; but he probably thinks that in his great pictures, where the grand and striking powers and effects of nature are exhibited, any thing of the same kind may interfere with the main design, and is therefore to be avoided. If this is his reason for slurring over his figures as he usually does, it is a mere mistake; but if he does so purposely, in order to keep the attention and admiration fixed to one point, he does not know what is due either to himself or to nature, and is guilty of a piece of quackery as well as injustice, exactly on a par with that of the great English actor Kemble,—who, when he performed any of his favourite characters, is said to have insisted that the other actors did not perform their parts *too well*, lest they should divide the attention of the audience with *him*. Besides these, there is another very charming picture by the same artist. It is a distant view of Sir J. Leicester's country seat. But here, as usual, nature is every thing, and the artificial objects connected with her, nothing; or at least they are used only as subordinate means of heightening and illustrating her power. Every thing in the picture is as it were saturated with sun-light. It is a portrait, not of a certain piece of scenery, but

of a certain state of atmosphere and light. But perhaps, upon the whole, the finest picture in this collection, and certainly the one which has most attracted and interested me, (probably on account of its illustrating my theory, respecting the noble historical and poetical painter that England has lost by tempting Sir Thomas Lawrence to devote his genius exclusively to one line of the art) is a whole length portrait of Lady Leicester, by that artist. Coming, as it does, into immediate comparison and competition with Hoppner's Venus, as well as the Europa of Hilton, a very rich and gorgeous picture, and the Pleïades of Howard, a very elegant one, and each of them perhaps the best and most poetical that those artists have produced, and being, as it is, no more than the portrait of a real earthly woman; this work is nevertheless infinitely more poetical than any of these pictures, or than all of them; it has more of an ideal character about it, and is at the same time more thoroughly imbued and instinct with natural truth of expression. Though less obviously and obtrusively appealing to the imagination than these professedly allegorical pictures do, it does the work of the poet much more rapidly and effectually, and has the power of calling up and sustaining an infinitely greater variety of poetical feelings and associations; at the same time strengthening and

beautifying these, by giving them a mysterious alliance with those realities of nature, without which they can have little value, because they can produce little permanent effect on the human mind. The lovely form of which the picture consists, is represented as stepping downward among sun-lit clouds, and seems to be returning to this nether world, after a visit to the ethereal regions above, and bringing thence looks that could only be got by "commercing with the skies," and that seem hastening to utter tidings of love and delight to the world which they are returning to beautify. The poetical and ideal character of this exquisite work, and that in which the real genius of the artist is displayed, is this; that it is impossible to look at it with any thing like a kindred feeling to that in which it was conceived and executed, without seeing Hope kindling in the eyes of the lovely visitant, and feeling it burn within our own bosoms at the same time; without seeing the Graces leading her by the hand, or floating about her footsteps, and Happiness waiting to welcome her when she shall again reach her earthly home: and we see these more vividly than if they were pictured to us in tangible forms, and recognise and acknowledge them more delightedly, because we may fancy that we see them through the sole medium of our own imaginations. If Sir Thomas

Lawrence were to paint many such portraits as this, we might the less regret that he paints nothing *but* portraits; but seeing *one* of this kind makes us regret it the more, because it so forcibly reminds us of what he might have done.

V. S.

LETTER XXIX.

The state of Sculpture in England may be said to be nearly on a general level with that of Painting; having reached a graceful and agreeable mediocrity: for mediocrity may be agreeable in these arts, though it cannot in poetry. The practical part of the art is, indeed, not so much cultivated as that of painting; because the taste for works of sculpture has always, except in the very highest state of the art, been much less generally diffused than for those of the other arts: to appreciate the merits of which, requires much less knowledge, and delicacy of feeling. But the art itself is as well understood, and the specimens of it that are from time to time produced, are, generally speaking, nearly as good as those of painting.

Looking at the number and value of his works, Flaxman may, perhaps, be said to stand at the head of his profession in England at present. I think he occupies, and deserves to occupy, much the same rank that West does as a painter;—possessing the same extensive knowledge, the same

cultivated taste, the same degree of practical skill, and the same mediocrity of natural gifts. But there is a classical refinement of feeling about his works, the evidences of which are not to be found in those of West; and this seems to be Flaxman's characteristic excellence. His mind is completely embued and saturated with classical images, feelings, and associations; and these impress themselves upon all his works, and give a character to them which is not to be found in those of any other living sculptor. He has the same feeling for his art, that may be supposed to have belonged to a Roman sculptor, of the time of Augustus; and it is derived from the same source,—namely, an intense love for, and study of, Grecian art: it also produces the same practical effects,—namely, an admirable imitation of that art, and no more. Every where we can see that the Greeks stand between him and nature. He studies her *in* them, not *through* them. I am not stating this as the fault of his style, but as the characteristic of it. If it had not possessed this characteristic, it would, probably, not have possessed any; for, as I have before said, I do not think he is gifted with that high degree of natural capacity which amounts to what is called genius; and if this is true, he will, perhaps, be likely to gain more by studying the Greek statues alone, than by looking at nature for

himself without their assistance. Certain it is, however, that his works possess a high and peculiar value, on account of their having more about them of what is, now-a-days, understood by the purely *classical* character, than any others I am acquainted with in any art. That glowing spirit, that almost *vital* principle, which belongs to the highest specimens of Grecian art, is, undoubtedly, not to be found in Flaxman's works; but in its place we have that chaste and graceful correctness, that vestal purity and beauty, which is next in value; and which, in its highest perfection, is of almost as rare occurrence. Flaxman's sculptures are to those of the best age of Greece, what Racine's tragedies are to Shakespeare's: unless it should be said, which I believe it may, that the Greek statues (the Elgin marbles for instance) combine in their very highest perfection, the peculiar attributes of these two different styles, which have hitherto, I know not why, been generally considered as incompatible with each other.

V. S.

LETTER XXX.

Chantry possesses higher natural gifts than Flaxman, and as much practical skill, but infinitely less knowledge. It is only within these very few years that this artist has started up from complete obscurity, to bear away the palm of genius and popularity from all English sculptors; and to dispute it even with those of Italy. If Chantry's acquirements were equal to his capacity, he would, probably, be able to take his place at once by the side of Canova and Thorsvalden, as one of the three first of living sculptors. As it is, he may be regarded as possessing a genius of the most delicate and exquisite kind; but he can at present only be expected to display it in the lower walks of the art. He probably possesses powers which would enable him to reach and succeed in the very highest; but there is great doubt whether the circumstances in which he is placed will ever permit him to exercise those powers. I am afraid the perverse nature of modern patronage will prevent him. A celebrated

English prose writer of the present day has said, that man has a natural appetite for having his portrait taken. It is so in England at least, notwithstanding all their protests against the imputation of vanity as a national weakness; and this contemptible propensity is the bane of their sculpture, as well as painting. The fame Chantry has acquired by the production of two or three exquisite ideal works, has overwhelmed him with commissions for busts and funeral monuments, the profits arising from which are too tempting to permit him to devote his time to those studies and acquirements which can alone enable him to become a great artist; and there will be little cause for wonder, whatever there may be for regret, if he now only produces just a sufficient number of ideal works to keep up that profitable reputation he has already acquired. I have some doubts, however, whether Chantry really is gifted with that kind, or at least that degree, of power, which can, under any circumstances, be expected to lift him to the very highest rank in his profession. That he has genius, there is no question; but I am inclined to think it is of that exquisitely delicate and feminine cast, which is likely to produce works deeply interesting in their immediate effects on the feelings and the heart, but not permanently affecting to the memory and the

imagination. All the best of his works have hitherto been of this secondary class; but in that class they have perhaps surpassed any thing that ever preceded them. They have all represented sleeping children, but have represented them with a natural grace and sweetness—have cast over them a holy calm—a brooding stillness—the touching effect of which has never been equalled by any other similar productions of the art: and which effect, though not so valuable as others of a more imaginative and poetical kind, is perhaps quite as rare, and as difficult to be produced. The works of which I am speaking are funeral monuments; so that, in order to perfect the design, it has been requisite to infuse into the character of the faces a mysterious mixture of death and life, which must have been extremely difficult to catch, and which nothing but true genius would have attempted, or had any chance of effecting. There is an ineffable look which sometimes envelopes the countenance, (particularly of children) and seems to radiate from it as a glory, for a short period after death. This Chantry has caught, and rendered permanent, apparently without an effort, and yet in the most perfect and touching manner.

It will be a sad pity if the exquisite genius possessed by this sculptor should be wasted and

frittered away, as I fear it will, in multiplying the not very classical heads of modern statesmen, warriors, and lords; and this, for their own special and exclusive pleasure and advantage, when it might and ought to be luxuriating amidst the forms and images of an ideal world, and comparing them with those of the real world about it; thus enabling itself to fulfil its high and holy calling, by beautifying this latter with those glimpses and insights, which can only come to it through the medium of genius, knowledge, and practical skill combined.

There are several other English sculptors, among whom may be mentioned Westmacott, Bacon, Rossi, Nollekins, &c., whose works display a laudable degree of taste, skill, and industry; but none of whom, as far as I am able to judge, possess any thing beyond these. I shall therefore, according to my plan of speaking in detail of those alone who display unquestionable characteristics of their own, conclude my account of the present state of English sculpture, without noticing any one of them in particular; merely adding that their efforts are chiefly devoted to that department of the art which is productive of certain and immediate profit, viz.: the execution of commissions for busts, and funeral and

commemorative monuments, both public and private. And, perhaps, this fact alone is sufficient proof of the mediocrity of their pretensions; for genius, where it really exists, will not suffer itself to be repressed, and bound down to such drudgery as this.

V. S.

LETTER XXXI.

I SHOULD enable you to form a very imperfect notion of the state of the fine arts in this country, if I did not make some mention of the several public institutions connected with the promotion of them; so that you must accept a short account of these, as the rather dry, but necessary accompaniment of the notices in my former letters on these subjects.

The ROYAL ACADEMY, and the BRITISH MUSEUM, are the only institutions connected with the promotion of the arts, which are under the immediate control of the government; and the latter of these is connected with them only as being the depository of a collection of ancient sculptures; all the other departments of it being connected with science and literature alone.

The Royal Academy of Arts was established in 1768, under the immediate patronage of the late king. It consists of forty principal members, who are called Royal Academicians, and an indefinite number of honorary members and associates.

Besides these there are four professors, who are at the head of as many schools of Painting, Perspective, Architecture, and Anatomy, as connected with art. These schools receive students gratuitously, under certain regulations, and on their producing certain evidences of their fitness to be admitted as such. In furtherance of the respective objects of these schools, the professors of each deliver a course of lectures annually; and these lectures are aided by the exhibition of living models, for the students to draw and paint from. The arrangements connected with these lectures are under the direction of nine academicians, who are elected annually for this purpose. The only strictly public business of the academy consists of an annual exhibition of painting and sculpture, the works of any British artists who may chuse to contribute them.* The admission and arrangement of these works are regulated by a special committee, appointed for that purpose; and almost any works which have the least degree, or even promise of merit, are pretty sure to be admitted, as the whole range of apartments belonging to the society, and used at other times for its various purposes, are devoted entirely to the reception of these works during the six weeks which the exhibition

* The works of foreign artists are admissible also.—Tr.

continues open, and as no one artist is allowed to send more than eight specimens. This renders the exhibition extremely various and miscellaneous in point of merit; but it perhaps encreases its popularity on that very account, and thus contributes to further the purposes of the institution, by giving a very large increase to its annual funds. The Royal Academy occasionally awards, to students who are considered worthy of the distinction, the means of studying for a certain period at Rome, at the society's expence. It also gives annual prizes of a less value, for pictures on stipulated subjects, supposing any to be offered which are considered to possess sufficient merit to claim the prize at all; if not it is reserved.

The British Institution is next in importance to the Royal Academy, as a public society for the exclusive encouragement of modern art; and chiefly of painting. This institution was established by private individuals alone. Its funds arise from voluntary subscriptions of the members, and from two annual exhibitions of paintings; one consisting of the works of living artists, and nearly similar to that of the Royal Academy, except that the works exhibited here are at the same time offered for sale; the other exhibition consists of a selection from the works of celebrated old masters, lent gratuitously by their possessors, for the ostensible

purpose of diffusing a correct taste among the public, and of offering facilities to young artists for studying the finest existing works of art. This institution, like the Royal Academy, offers prizes for the best pictures on stated subjects, occasionally purchases works of distinguished merit, and gives premiums and gratuities to living artists. These, and all its other affairs, are conducted by a committee chosen from among the subscribers.

This is an institution highly honourable to the taste and public spirit of the country, and its beneficial effects on art are already felt and acknowledged, though it has been established but a very few years. The selections from the works of old masters, which have from time to time been exhibited here, in classes and schools, have been considered as unrivalled in their kind,—consisting, as they have, of the choicest specimens that could be collected together, from the numerous splendid galleries which belong to wealthy individuals in all parts of the country.

It is said that the members of the Royal Academy are a little jealous of the success of this institution, and that they particularly object to this exhibition of the works of the old masters; contending that it is injurious instead of beneficial to the interests of modern art, the furtherance of which interests is the ostensible, and ought to be

the sole object of the institution. They say that the perpetual public exhibition of *selected* specimens, from a *selected* era of art, encourages unjust and injurious comparisons with the works of living artists; which latter cannot be subjected to the same kind of selection, and must, moreover, be seen without the advantages, both real and imaginary, which are derived from age, association of ideas, &c. This objection, if it really be felt and expressed, though it may seem a little plausible at first, is paltry, shallow, and selfish enough, and is calculated to excite the mingled contempt and indignation of all true lovers of art. That the encouragement of excellence is repressed by exciting our love and admiration towards it, is a contradiction in terms; and yet this is precisely what the persons in question, if there be such, contend: unless, indeed, it is the *practice* of the art alone, not the achievement of excellence in it, that they wish to be encouraged. If they would have all the world turn painters, or lovers of painting, without regard to genius or merit, let them by all means repress the exhibition of excellence, or deny its existence, and destroy it, wherever it is to be found: but if they have the sense to see that it is for the benefit of all parties that none should practice the art who have no pretensions to excel in it, let them lose no occasion of promoting

the diffusion of a pure and discriminating taste. Where this does not exist, there is no difference felt between the lowest mediocrity and the highest genius; where this does exist, mediocrity must retire, whether it will or no, and genius must triumph. And will they deny that this is as it should be? Perhaps mediocrity itself will; but none else. If this desire to repress admiration towards the old masters, in order to concentrate it upon living artists, really has been expressed, it must have proceeded exclusively from mere pretenders to art, who have no claims whatever to be heard on the subject: and from them it is natural enough, for a single exhibition like those in question is pretty sure to sweep them and their efforts to oblivion at once. But the painter of real genius, of whom there are several at present in England, cannot be so blind to his own interest, (using the term in its narrowest sense, as applying to merely present fame and profit,) as not to perceive, that whatever cultivates our perceptions of abstract excellence, and excites our love towards it, must necessarily increase the funds from which *his* claims are to be satisfied.

V. S.

LETTER XXXII.

There is nothing in which England is more strikingly inferior to the continental nations, and particularly to France, than in the number and value of her strictly *public* institutions for the promotion of scientific knowledge. The single establishment of the Jardin des Plantes, is infinitely richer in objects connected with the study of natural history, than all the collections of England put together, whether national or otherwise. Indeed the British Museum is the only national establishment of the kind. I mean it is the only one under the direction of the government, and supported by the public funds. All the others have been collected by private individuals, or by bodies of these; sanctioned, indeed, but in no way assisted, by the heads of the nation—who have ever, during the whole of England's annals, up to the present moment, seemed to regard the general interests of science, literature, and art, as matters quite be-

neath their sphere, and unworthy their attention. Even the British Museum itself, though extremely valuable in its library department, and still more so in its collection of sculptural, architectural, and other antiquities, is, as a museum of natural history, unworthy of particular notice; for though it possesses many rare and valuable objects, there is nothing like completeness in any one of its various departments, except the very inferior one of mineralogy; and apparently there is no attempt or intention to make it so. So that the only purpose for which this portion of the collection serves, is to draw together a crowd of idle, ignorant, and uninterested gazers, who walk through the various rooms in a maze of stupid wonder, at the sight of so many "curious" things, the like of which they never saw before, and never desire to see again.

The building in which this Museum is deposited was erected by the French architect, Peter Puget, for the dwelling of an English nobleman. It is very extensive, but in other respects demands no particular notice. The library of printed books and manuscripts, occupies no less than twenty separate apartments, and is of infinite value, no doubt, as a *national* collection; but as a general one, it is perhaps inferior to several others. This library is perpetually encreasing, in virtue of a law

which compels the publisher of every new work, of whatever description, to present two copies of it gratuitously to the trustees of this Museum, for the public use. You will think that this law is not exactly in the boasted spirit of English laws in general; especially when I tell you that the said public, for whose express use these copies are exacted, are not permitted to have access to them, except under certain restrictions and difficulties, which deter almost every one from availing himself of the benefit. In fact, this library is scarcely ever used, except by a few scholars, students, and authors, who are compelled to apply to it for those rarities in literature which they cannot find elsewhere.

That part of the Museum comprising objects connected with the study of natural history, occupies three large apartments on the upper floor; two apartments are filled by a most admirable and splendid collection of ancient vases, and miscellaneous objects illustrative of ancient manners: the rest of the building, except the apartments of the various officers of the institution, is devoted to the gallery of sculptural antiquities. This occupies a suit of spacious apartments, exceedingly well adapted to the purpose, and the objects are arranged with a tolerable degree of taste and judgment. This

gallery, like all the other valuable parts of this Museum, and indeed like every thing else of any public value in this country, originated with a private individual. Sir Charles Townley had, during his life, made what was at that time an unrivalled collection of objects of antiquity connected with the art of sculpture; and at his death, the government,—in compliance with a strong public feeling which existed at the time, that such a collection ought not to be separated and scattered abroad again,—did muster up spirit enough to sanction the purchase of it as a national possession; and since then it has been increasing from various sources, till it has at last become a very fine and interesting collection. Still, however, when thought of in comparison with what the Louvre was, —and even with what it *is*—the whole gallery, (with the exception of the marbles from the Parthenon—which can only be regarded, generally, as a school of study) must be considered as trifling and insignificant; for it contains not one object of grand and surpassing beauty, and none that can be regarded as at all approaching in value to several in that collection, except a few exceedingly fine busts, a lovely statue of Venus, which may rank with those which come immediately *after* the Venus de Medici, a small but most beautiful Caryatide, an exquisite laughing fawn, and a *discobolus*, which

might bear a comparison with the gladiator itself. I have been now speaking of that class of sculpture which belongs to the best ages of antiquity. In its early Egyptian remains, this Museum possesses such a treasure as was never before collected together: but it must not be forgotten that it owes this treasure solely to the taste and researches of *our* countrymen. Nearly the whole of the objects, in this class of works, were collected by the French in Egypt, and ceded to the English at the capitulation of Alexandria. These have, indeed, lately been enriched by an addition, which is perhaps more valuable than any of them, both on account of the celebrity of the statue of which it formed a part, and the extraordinary difficulties that must have been overcome in getting it to this country. I mean the Memnon's head, brought from Egypt by Belzoni.

It only remains for me to mention what are called here the Elgin marbles; that is to say, the fragments of what once formed the external sculptural ornaments of, without exception, the most perfect and beautiful of all the Greek temples. Mere hints and fragments, as even the least mutilated of these are, they must still be considered as the only real glory of this collection; as in fact the only possession of this kind, except the Cartoons of Raphael, of which England can boast, as being

worth making a pilgrimage to her expressly to see. In regarding these sublime works with reference to the intense genius which the creation of them displays, and adding to the feelings thus excited those which must at the same time be called forth by collateral associations, *words* become a perfectly inadequate medium through which to commune with others, still less with ourselves, on the subject of them. The full value of these things may perhaps be *felt*, by the few who will take the pains to think of them under all their bearings, and who are able to gaze upon them clustered around by the host of images and associations that are allied to them; but it cannot be adequately reckoned up, and described, by any one. It is an occasion for which language was not made, and in which it may do infinite harm, but can do little good; for, to those who do not of themselves feel and think all that can be felt and thought about them, any thing that can be said of them worthily must appear hyperbolical and ridiculous; while to those who *do* feel and think adequately on the subject, any thing further must be superfluous: and to prose and prate about them *un*worthily, is nothing less than sacrilege, against the divinity of which their beauties are an emanation. In fact, all that has been said about them hitherto, (I mean in the way of praise) has been little better than mere imperti-

nence, and has not excited a single new idea or sensation, in any of those, who, by their habits and associations, are capable of feeling about them at all; and to those who are not in this condition, it must all have appeared little else than a lie, a mockery, or a joke. They had better at once be left to do their own work silently, for to this they must and will be left at last; and it is in this that their real value mainly consists.

You are, I know, fully acquainted with what these works comprise generally; but I may as well mention, that the chief of them consist of fifteen square slabs, which formed as many metopes of the exterior frieze of the temple; several fragments of figures and groups from the two pediments; and nearly all the sculpture in low relief, which formed a continued picture all round the upper part of the exterior of the cella, and of which there is a small specimen in the Louvre. Of these, undoubtedly the finest is the statue of the Ilissus; and, next, that of Theseus. But for my own part, I think the most extraordinary piece of the whole is the single horse's head, which rose from one angle of the eastern pediment, and belonged to the Chariot of Night, who was represented as about to plunge into the ocean, as Hyperion rose from it at the opposite angle of the same pediment. There seems to me to be more power, spirit, and as

it were *vitality*, in this single head, than in any thing of the kind I ever beheld. It is also worth while for me to tell you, (for I believe you will not learn it from any public source, and it is far from decreasing the inestimable value of these works,) that, though the frieze of the cella is executed, for the most part, with astonishing ease, spirit and grace, and is, as a whole, quite worthy the sublime work of which it formed a part, yet that two or three small portions of it have evidently been done by a mere tyro in the art, and have accidentally been left untouched by the master's hand. This fact, though it cannot but have been observed by the numerous artists and others who have examined and written on these works, has, as far as I know, never been publicly mentioned by any one of them. This, like denying the faults of Shakespeare, is quite unworthy, both of themselves, and of the works in favour of which they choose thus to belie their own knowledge. For my part, I cannot help considering this fact as one highly interesting, both to the feelings and the imagination. In default of something of this kind, however we may *know* that these divine works proceeded from the hands of mere mortals like ourselves, we should hardly be able satisfactorily to feel that this was the case.

I had nearly forgotten to mention to you another very interesting collection of fragments belonging

to this collection, and which were discovered a few years ago, near the ancient Phigalia, in Arcadia. They consist, like the Elgin marbles, of the sculptural ornaments of a temple, and formed the interior frieze of the cella. Half of them are also on the same subject as those from the exterior frieze of the Parthenon: viz. the Battles of the Centaurs and Lapithæ. The other half represent combats between Greeks and Amazons. The general style of these works is that of the best age of Grecian art; but they are still very inferior to the sculptures from the Parthenon. Their collateral value is greatly increased by our certainty, from the information of Pausanias, that the temple to which they belonged, and in the ruins of which they were discovered, was built by Ictinus, the same architect who built the Parthenon.

V. S.

P. S. In looking over what I have written you about the sculptures from the Parthenon, I find I have not said any thing directly descriptive of what appears to me to be the peculiar characteristic of their style. Perhaps my *not* having been impelled to do so while thinking of them, is not unillustrative of that characteristic. In describing, from memory, a beautiful human form, we never think

of assuring our hearers that it was actually composed of flesh and blood; that it was, in fact, *no more* than a human form. Thus it is with these sculptures. They are no more than what they pretend to be: and *this* is their peculiar and distinguishing beauty. They are absolutely perfect imitations of select nature; and nothing else. Hence may be accounted for, the fact that, in general observers, they excite little or no admiration. To ensure general attention towards any particular object of which we have numerous examples constantly before our eyes, that object must present something monstrous, either in the way of beauty or deformity. Now these sculptures present nothing of the kind: they are no more grand, or graceful, or beautiful, or expressive, than nature has made their prototypes. Perhaps the most just and compendious criticism that has yet been pronounced upon them, was included in a few words, said to have proceeded, quite unconsciously, from one of the crowd of persons who visited these works when they were first exposed to public view. "What!" said this person, after looking about him for a little while, "What! are *these* the celebrated statues which have cost the nation so much money, and about which such a fuss has been made? Why, I don't see any thing particular in them! they are no better, as far as I

can see, than mere men and women!" If this story is an invention, it is a stroke of genius in the inventor; and, if true, it is still more interesting, as an example of nature herself uttering one of her deepest truths, as she sometimes does, through the lips of fools and children.

In fact, these things do not excite general attention at all. They are duly appreciated by a few, and will perform their appropriate work on *them*; and they are visited and wondered at by all: but the wonder of these latter is called forth purely by the circumstance of their finding nothing in them to wonder at. If the fragment of the Horse's Head had represented, instead, the head of a unicorn, all the naturals and naturalists in Europe would have been enraptured at this proof that UNICORNS *once existed in Greece!* But as this sublime piece of workmanship proves no more than that PHIDIAS *once existed in Greece*, nobody seems to care much about it! The crowds who walk into, for the purpose of again walking out of, this hallowed receptacle of ancient power, (and hallowed it would deserve to be, if it were only in virtue of this one piece of stone) never think of bestowing a moment on this, the grandest object it contains; for such I think the Horse's Head is, as far as regards the miraculous skill of its creator.

This part of the subject would admit of a long dissertation, which, if it began in a sermon, would certainly end in a satire. But as the contemplation of these glorious works has left me in a mood little disposed to either of these, I shall here take my reluctant leave of this collection at once: only adding that, when the time arrives that I am to quit this country for my own, the only inanimate objects I shall regret to leave behind me, will be the sculptures from the Parthenon.

V. S.

LETTER XXXIII.

I PROMISED to tell you something of English music. England maintains a rank in musical science much inferior to even that which she held thirty or forty years ago; and she seems to be every day retrograding rather than advancing. We are accustomed, in France, to regard England as being totally without a vocal music which can properly be said to have a character of its own. This is far from being the case, speaking of it as an actual possession; but, as far as respects that which belongs to the present day, it is perfectly true. The most popular and distinguished of her living composers is a gentleman named Bishop, who is attached exclusively to one of the Royal Theatres. He possesses considerable musical knowledge, much grace and facility of style, and an elegant, accurate, and cultivated taste; but I think he has no pretensions whatever to the praise belonging to genius. There are few of his most admired compositions that I have not heard; and I find no evidence of original power in any of them. His melodies are many of them simple,

sweet, and expressive, and his accompaniments graceful and appropriate; but they almost all commune with the senses alone, not with the heart. They are to the compositions of Mozart, Haydn, and the Italian composers of the last century, what pleasant *vers de societé* are to high poetry.

Nearly the same may be said of all the other English composers who have acquired a temporary reputation; such as Stevenson, Mazzinghi, Shield, Braham, Atwood, Davy, &c. They have taste, and a certain degree of feeling, but little else; and I think that any thing like a detailed account of their works would be quite uninteresting to you. I must not omit to mention, however, two separate works of living composers, which hardly seem to claim a place in the music of the present day, as it is many years since they were composed, and their authors have never since produced any thing equal, or that can be compared with them. Their character and merit, too, assimilate them much more to the English music of the last century. The works I allude to are Rosina, an operetta by Shield; and Paul and Virginia, a composition of the same class, by Mazzinghi, the subject of which is taken from our lovely tale by St. Pierre. These two works may be considered as the last specimens that have appeared in this country, of a style of music purely national, possessing a

character, not strikingly, and almost obtrusively and affectedly different from all other music, like the Italian; but yet a character entirely its own, and which is not to be found in the music of any other country. Though I feel this difference of character very sensibly, I do not very well know how to describe it. Speaking of it, however, with reference at the same time to those examples which occur in the works of Arne, Jackson, Purcell, and other English composers of real genius, who lived in the last century, I may perhaps describe it as addressing itself directly and exclusively to the *heart:* not to the heart and senses together, like the best Italian music; or to the heart, the senses, and the imagination, like the music of the first German composers; but to the heart alone. Speaking of it generally, I should say, it has none of the voluptuous grace of the Italian school, or the majestic beauty and the intense expression of Mozart; but there is a purely pastoral sweetness and simplicity about it—it breathes a tender and unaffected pathos—which are exceedingly touching and delightful, and which are purely its own; and these may well supply the place of qualities more striking in their immediate effect, but perhaps not more permanently affecting in their consequence, or more difficult to reach. The music of which I am speaking may be more

aptly compared with that of Rousseau's *Devin du Village*, than with any other to which I could refer you. It does not exalt the imagination, or fire the senses, or stir the blood; but there is a sound of *home* in every line of it; it goes quietly to the heart at once, and there it dwells for ever, forming a possession *which* nothing can deteriorate or destroy.

I shall not go into a minute detail of the pieces to which the above observations particularly refer, because I intend to carry a selection of them home with me, when you will have an opportunity of verifying or disproving what I have now said; for I cannot help anticipating that my foreign importations in this particular will produce almost as great a sensation and revolution at our winter evening parties at V——, as those of St. Preux and my Lord B——, did at Vevai. In the meantime, however, I may mention that the pieces of English composition to which I most particularly refer, are the Artaxerxes of Dr. Arne, which is, perhaps, as perfect a composition in its kind as exists; the two operettas of which I have before spoken; Purcell and Arne's music to some of Shakespeare's songs in the Tempest, Hamlet, &c.; and many separate songs and duets by Arne, Jackson, Purcell, &c.

I believe the climate of their country will pre-

vent the English from ever being a musical people; as the want of imagination, and a permanent and healthful sensibility, prevent the French from being so: but while the former have such music as this of their own to apply to, and such singers as Miss Stephens and Mrs. Salmon to sing it to them, they can never be very deficient in a taste for what is natural and true in the art.

In instrumental music I believe England stands pretty much on a level with our own country. She has many clever and tasteful composers of chamber music, and a few brilliant and finished performers; but with them, as with the rest of Europe, the days of Gluck, Pergolesi, Corelli, the Bachs, Haydn, Mozart, &c. are gone by, I fear for ever.

V. S.

LETTER XXXIV.

In writing you these slight sketches of the present state of the Fine Arts in England, I have been led to consider of the more immediate causes which have prevented the chief of them—viz: Painting—from reaching, or even approaching to, that station which it occupied in Europe three centuries ago; and I can find none which seem adequate to account for this failure, except the single one of a deficiency of the same kind of encouragement and patronage which it received at that period. *Then* there was a steady and consistent *demand* for the finest productions of the pencil, which there has never been since, and without which they can never be expected to appear. All things else may be favourable to the production of them. There may be, and in fact there is at this time in England, an extensive diffusion of taste, unrivalled facilities for study and acquirement, and a public feeling disposed, and even eager, to award due fame and honour to deserving candidates for them: but the one essential and indispensable stimulus to exertion is wanting; namely, a regular and unfailing call for first-rate works. Artists have

almost invariably consisted of persons bred to their profession, and depending on it exclusively for their subsistence. There are fewer exceptions to this among painters and sculptors than among the members of any other profession whatever. Indeed, as far as I remember, there has been no one instance of an artist of distinguished merit, who did not come under this class. Many have attained to distinction and wealth by the practice of their profession; but all have began it as a means of getting their daily bread. They have *chosen* it, perhaps, as the means most congenial to their dispositions; but they have afterwards followed it as the *only* means. The other liberal professions, of the pulpit, the bar, literature, medicine, &c. have always included among their members many who have engaged in them chiefly as a mental occupation, and have been directed to them more by inclination than necessity; and these have frequently attained to a distinguished rank. But this has never happened in painting and sculpture. It is remarkable, and on a superficial view of the subject it seems unaccountable, that this should be so universally true as it is, considering that painters and sculptors, almost in an equal degree with poets, in order to attain first-rate excellence, must be endowed with natural perceptions and sensibilities of the very highest, rarest, and most refined class. But,

being true, it is not to be wondered at that the state of art should mainly depend on the state of patronage. The demand for works of genius in England is confined to a very few private individuals; and it is the fashion, among the greater number even of these, to *praise* modern pictures, but to *buy* only ancient ones. The prizes given by the Royal Academy, and the British Institution, are necessarily confined to a comparatively small amount of value, and therefore create but a very small, and at best uncertain, demand; and for the rest, artists may paint fine pictures, and the critics will praise them, the public will admire them, and the Academies will award the empty honours due to them: but in the meantime the artist may starve!—these honours and this admiration, severed from the solid emolument which ought to accompany them, are baneful rather than beneficial to him; they raise his hopes, and expand and multiply his wants and desires, and thus leave him doubly dependent on external circumstances for that content which he might have drawn from within himself, and from the favourite objects of his contemplation, if he had been left with those simple tastes and desires which usually belong to uncorrupted genius. A man of real genius, in the beginning of his career thrown back upon himself by neglect, or a want of due encouragement and

stimulus from without, is likely to take a wise and kindly revenge upon the world, by becoming all-sufficient to himself, and being happy in despite of it. But if you buoy him up from time to time with hopes which are never to be fulfilled; if you give him artificial wants, without the means of gratifying them; if you lead him into the way of making comparisons which must end in jealousy and vexation, by shewing him that he is the least, where he feels that he ought to be among the greatest; you give him a second nature which is stronger than the first, and make him proud, fierce, impatient, intolerant, melancholy, a hater and contemner of himself and his species,—who might, and ought to have been mild, kind, humble, gentle, cheerful, contented with himself, a lover of mankind and of all beings and things. In England, and it is now the same to a still greater degree in France and Italy, there is no consistent and steady call for the highest productions of art; and consequently there are few produced. When Europe sees another Lorenzo de Medici and a Leo X. she may hope to see another Raphael, Michael Angelo, Leonardo da Vinci, &c.; but till then, she must be content to accept moderate merit in return for moderate patronage; for, in these times, it is patronage that must call forth genius, not genius patronage.

V. S.

LETTER XXXV.

The account I am able to offer you relative to the state of Science in England, will be confined to a slight notice of the public institutions established for the promotion of it.

The Royal Society of London is the only really important institution of the kind in the metropolis; the only one, the influence and effects of which are sufficiently felt and recognized, to render it a truly national society, worthy of a great and powerful country. It was established about one hundred and sixty years ago, under very humble auspices, by a few private individuals; and continued its meetings for some few years, without exciting any particular notice or attention. But in 1663, just after the Restoration of Charles II., that monarch granted the society a royal charter; and it then became a rallying point for all the distinguished scientific men of the day, and has continued to be so ever since. The affairs of the Royal Society are conducted by a council consisting of twenty-one of its members, including its president, and the chief officers. Ten of this council vacate their seats every year, and the vacancies

are filled up by ballot. The funds of the society arise entirely from the contributions of the members, each of whom pays five guineas, as an admission fee, and thirteen shillings per quarter. Its meetings are held weekly, during the season; on which occasions are read original papers, and reports from corresponding members, on subjects connected with the promotion of science in all its various branches. A selection from these reports and readings is published occasionally, under the title of "Transactions of the Royal Society."

The presidency of this society is considered as a high honour; and it is usually held by the most distinguished scientific philosopher of the day. The celebrated Sir Isaac Newton held this seat during his life. It has, for many years past, been filled by Sir Joseph Banks, the celebrated botanist and experimental philosopher who sailed round the globe with Cook. He is just now dead; and, as was expected, his place has been given, as it were by acclamation, to Sir Humphry Davy, to whom chemical science is indebted for the most brilliant discoveries that were perhaps ever made; and who is, himself, so much indebted to the previous discoveries of the French chemists, and particularly the illustrious and unfortunate Lavoisier, without which it is doubtful whether his would ever have been effected.

The Antiquarian Society, though greatly inferior to the Royal Society in influence and importance, is of earlier date than that, and of more illustrious origin, having been established about the year 1572, by those celebrated antiquaries, Archbishop Parker, Camden, Sir Robert Cotton, Stowe, and others; and it had nearly received the sanction and patronage of the greatest sovereign that England ever knew; I mean Elizabeth. Application for a charter, &c. was made to her in 1589, and it was understood that she was on the point of granting it; but on her sudden death, her successor, James I. did not favour the design, and the society sank, for a time, into neglect. In 1717, however, it was again revived, and has flourished ever since. In 1751 this society was also incorporated by a royal charter. Its affairs, like those of the Royal Society, are conducted by a council of twenty-one, chosen by ballot from among the members, and about half of whom vacate their seats every year. Its funds, also, arise in the same manner, from the annual contributions of the members. Its sittings are weekly during the season; and it occasionally publishes a volume of papers, &c. under the title of "Archæologia." The objects of this society, as its name indicates, are exclusively confined to the promotion of antiquarian researches.

The Linnæan Society is of the same description

with the foregoing, as to the detail of it, though its objects seem to be anticipated by those of the Royal Society, and included in them. The same may be said of the Agricultural, the Horticultural, and several other English societies, of which it is unnecessary for me to give you a particular account. But it is, perhaps, for the interest of science, that this friendly rivalship should exist; for without it, in a wealthy and commercial nation like this, every institution which does not contribute to the obvious and tangible benefit of the community, might be apt to flag, and sink into neglect.

V. S.

LETTER XXXVI.

The societies of which I gave you an account in my last, are devoted exclusively to the promotion of science, and have therefore nothing of a mixed and popular character about them. As might be anticipated, however, in a country like this,—where the middling and commercial classes think themselves, and in fact *are*, of the utmost importance in the estimate of the national character,—there are several other institutions which have been raised and established in London and elsewhere by these classes, for the purpose of blending science and literature together, and making them in some degree subservient to a rational and instructive amusement. In several of these establishments this purpose has been effected in a very complete and satisfactory manner. It is true that these institutions are from their very nature calculated to diffuse, and *have* in fact diffused, over the surface of society, a superficial semblance of knowledge, which only serves to shew the real absence of it—a glimmer of light which only makes the real darkness more obvious. But the effects arising from

this, however ridiculous they may sometimes be, can never become very mischievous among a people like the English, who never for any length of time fancy themselves what they are not, and cannot be, or run after a shadow, or even a substance, which they cannot reach. Among us, where the people are always ready to believe themselves any thing that they are *not*, a multiplication of such institutions as those of which I am speaking would be likely, for a time, to do infinite mischief. Once or twice already we have fancied ourselves a nation of philosophers; and, in trying to prove ourselves such, have gone near to establish the opposite proposition. But it is not so here. Generally speaking, an Englishman, with all his faults, knows, better than the native of any other country, the real rank he holds and is entitled to hold in society, and the true nature and value of his pretensions to mental power and acquirement; and is the least disposed to force himself out of his own sphere, or to put forth claims that he cannot make good. So that, although these institutions may have contributed to increase a foolish, but somewhat natural desire, which we all of us have, to be thought more knowing than we are, or than we choose to take the trouble of making ourselves; yet they have also diffused an anxious craving and a diligent search after knowledge, arising out of a real perception of

its value, and a sincere love of its nature and effects. In France, or at least in Paris, these institutions would only have made hosts of vain and ignorant chatterers about science, for one real lover of it; as I am afraid it cannot be denied that the glorious treasures of the Louvre did with respect to art. But here, even if they have increased the number of empty talkers, it can hardly be alledged as a complaint against them, in a nation where silence is the besetting sin.—But I must proceed to describe to you one of these societies; and in describing one I am giving you an account of them all. For this purpose I shall choose that which is called the Surrey Institution; not because it is the principal establishment of the kind, but because I am better acquainted with it than with any of the others, from having constantly attended its rooms and public meetings since I have been here: I understand too, from M——, that this has fulfilled its purposes, and the promises with which it set out, better than any of its rivals. This institution was established about twelve years ago, by a body of respectable persons in the middle classes of life, and for the most part connected with commerce. It consists of seven hundred proprietors, each of whom advanced thirty pounds to create a permanent fund for the support of the establishment; which fund is increased by the admission of annual

subscribers who pay three guineas, and for this sum enjoy the same privileges as the proprietors. The institution comprises an extensive library, which circulates among the proprietors and subscribers, under certain restrictions, and which is constantly supplied with all the new works of general interest that appear from time to time. Besides this, there is a room supplied with all the periodical works of the day, and another with the newspapers, foreign as well as domestic; a laboratory, which is open to the members to make experiments, &c. and an elegant and commodious theatre, in which lectures are delivered twice a week during the winter season, on various subjects connected with science, fine arts, the belles lettres, &c. All these are open to the proprietors and subscribers, without any restrictions whatever; and they form altogether one of the most pleasing, as well as useful and convenient establishments, that can be found in any country. Indeed I believe no country but England possesses, or is likely to possess, any thing of the kind. It is only here that extensive and really important institutions like these can be conducted with the spirit and effect that they are conducted with here, or be raised to that permanent rank which they hold, entirely by the exertions and the property of private individuals strictly in the middle classes of life. Here is an

institution (and there are four such in London, of which this is on the smallest scale) diffusing more taste for literary and scientific pursuits, and causing more books to be purchased and to be read, than half the institutes and academies of France put together; and it is supported and conducted with the most perfect propriety, spirit and decorum, by a comparatively small number of private individuals, whom nobody ever heard of out of their own domestic circles! Undoubtedly it is exclusively to the character of her middle classes that England owes her present pre-eminence among nations. Her nobles are no better than those of other countries, and her lower classes are infinitely worse; but that class of her people which stands at the farthest point of distance from these two, is incomparably superior to that of any other nation in the world. It is by and through them that she has come to be what she is; and it is only by maintaining them in their present character and position that she can hope to maintain her own. Any thing that tends to weaken and deteriorate the admirable good sense, the steady principle, and the deep and pure moral feeling of this truly noble class of Englishmen, will at the same time sap the foundation, and dim the lustre, of England's best glory.

V. S.

MAHARAJA SERFOJI'S
THE

LETTER XXXVII.

You ask me to send you any observations that I may have hitherto made, as to the condition of society in this country, the English character, &c. I intended to have remained here some time longer before I attempted this; but as I am more than usually unoccupied just now, I readily comply with your wishes. It would not be easy to form a conception of any general state of society less adapted to call into play the best affections of the heart, and the higher qualities of the intellect, than that which prevails in London at the present day. The general social intercourse established in great cities has seldom been very directly calculated to effect this purpose; but here it seems formed with views directly and expressly *opposed* to such a purpose, and it seems to have realized those views in a very remarkable manner; for, as far as it can be observed and studied in general intercourse, and can be considered as formed or modified by that, nothing can be more cold, hard, coarse, ignorant, selfish, vain, and altogether repulsive, than the English character is at present. It would, of course, be ridiculous to

deny that there are numerous exceptions to the truth of this statement, and to which no one part of it applies; but I speak of the general aspect that presents itself on mixing with English society, either at public places of resort, or in private life.

English travellers are never backward to hunt out and proclaim the vices and errors of surrounding nations in these respects; and particularly of the French. Ever since the peace their journals and periodical works have teemed with essays, letters, sketches, notices, &c. on what they are pleased to consider as the vices and follies of the French character; depicting it as loose and even licentious in the highest degree, in its notions and habits on moral and religious subjects; and as, moreover, idle, capricious, restless, insincere, and though, generally speaking, superficial or entirely ignorant, yet vain, pretending, insolent, and dogmatical. And (as tracing every thing to its proximate cause, is what the English consider as their *forte*) they have endeavoured to prove that these vices and follies are the necessary consequences of the state of society existing in the French capital, and propagated thence to every part of the country. It is not worth while (for *me* at all events, and writing to *you*) to deny either portion of this proposition. But it may be worth while, and it is at least but fair in return, to examine a little more closely into

the nature of their own pretensions in these particulars: though I should probably not have been induced to do this at all minutely, and certainly not in the *spirit* in which I am afraid I shall not be able to avoid doing it now, but from seeing and feeling the extreme and ridiculous injustice they have done to us in this respect.

The most distinguishing feature of the English character, as it is observable in the general intercourse of society, (and it is this view of it alone that I am about to take) is a dead, dreary selfishness, which shows itself in a total seclusion within its own thoughts, feelings, and habits, and a total disregard to those of other people, added to an entire carelessness about letting that disregard be seen. Selfishness is the main spring and principle of an Englishman's actions, from the most insignificant to the most important. If, in the street, he relieves a beggar, it is to get rid of him; if he gives way to a stranger or a female, it is because it vexes him to be run against; if he stops to speak to a friend, it is because he recollects that he has something to ask of him; if he pulls off his hat at the theatre, it is for fear of having it pushed off for him; if he invites you to his house, it is because he can afford it; and if he treats you handsomely when you go there, it is that you may remember it, as he does not fail to do;– in short, not to multiply examples,

if ever he looks up, on passing, at his own city's cathedral, which is the noblest work of art in the world, it is to see what o'clock it is, that he may not be too late for dinner: not that he cares about keeping his family waiting; but he likes his roast meat *underdone.*

Next in intensity to an Englishman's selfishness is his personal vanity; of which he has an infinitely greater share than the native of any other nation of civilized Europe. I sincerely believe that the love of virtue, of country, and of human nature, have less share in his character than in that of almost any other people of modern or ancient times; and that the excellent political institutions of England, and the noble public charities which are deservedly her boast and glory, owe their rise and stability infinitely less to a general diffusion of patriotism, public spirit, and benevolence, than to a universal prevalence of intense personal vanity, which is cherished and turned to account by the skill and sagacity of statesmen, and by that true Christian charity, that really disinterested benevolence, which will always be found among individuals in every age and country. These institutions stand firm, and flourish, because the English *pride themselves* upon their existence, and on the comparative national superiority which results from them. If they refused to support them, they would not have them

to *boast of*. It is to the indefatigable exertions of enlightened and disinterested, and sometimes of interested, individuals, that all the public charities of London owe their establishment; and when I describe to you the manner in which their funds are raised in the first instance, and kept up from time to time, you will see that I am not very far from being correct in attributing their support to personal vanity, turned, it is true, to an admirable account; but an account to which the wise and good may turn every thing. When it is intended to raise funds for the establishment of a charitable institution of any kind, the first step is to call a public meeting, by an advertisement in the newspapers of the day; in which it is stated that the meeting will be attended by such and such persons, who are well known as eloquent public speakers. This meeting is open to any person of decent appearance who may choose to attend; and thus another of the characteristics of an Englishman is appealed to—his curiosity. At this meeting the purposes and views of the proposed institution are stated, and eloquent speeches are made by persons who come prepared for this purpose, showing the advantages that will result to all classes of the community from the establishment of it, and containing appeals to the passions of the hearers, their interest, and lastly to their vanity; for it is usually understood that the

names of the persons subscribing will be *published in the newspapers.* This is the only appeal which an Englishman's boasted *reason* will not enable him to withstand. As to the general *utility* of the plan, that is no concern of his; the appeals to his passions in favour of his suffering fellow-creatures he *feels* for a moment, but the next moment he laughs at the weakness of allowing himself to be so worked upon; endeavouring to show that assisting in the proposed establishment will conduce to his personal interests, he considers as a piece of mere impertinence—as if he does not know what his own interest is better than any one else can tell him! But this last appeal to his personal vanity, this certainty of reading his own name in *print,* and of having it read by hundreds of thousands of his fellow-countrymen, is not to be resisted: so he pays his guinea, and goes home, perfectly satisfied if the promise thus made is duly fulfilled, and perfectly careless as to the application of his bounty; but sorely vexed and disappointed if, in printing the said name, any mistake should occur in the initials or orthography, and greatly scandalized that the persons who undertake to attend to these things do not perform their duties better! There are several other means resorted to of raising funds for these purposes; all equally ingenious with the above-mentioned, and equally

appealing to the same characteristic feeling. At the meeting which I have described, a committee is usually appointed, to carry the details of the plan into execution. If the funds already collected are not considered as adequate to their purpose, the gentlemen of wealth and consideration, who form the committee, go round, two or three together, in their respective neighbourhoods, where their names and persons are likely to be known, and call at the houses of the different inhabitants, requesting a personal interview, and stating their names and their objects in calling. Now, for a substantial tradesman, or a retired merchant, (and these are always the class of persons thus called upon) to refuse so small a sum as a guinea, when it is sued for by such respectable gentlemen as those before him, would look very mean indeed; and besides, in the case of the tradesman, it might injure his business to a greater amount; so he pays his guinea as a tax on his consequence and respectability, and never enquires what has or is to become of it!

It is not very pleasant for me to dwell on these things, as you will easily believe; but as it would be unjust and illiberal in me to adopt and express—even to you—such an opinion as I have on the subject in question, without being able fully to support it by what seem to me unquestionable

proofs, I must mention one other means which is constantly adopted, as the most effectual of any other in raising funds for the support of public charities in this country. Almost every Institution of the kind alluded to has a *public dinner*, on the anniversary of the day on which it was established. At this meeting, as at the one noticed above, some person of distinction—frequently a prince of the Royal Family—takes the chair; and the price fixed on the tickets of admission is usually very moderate, in proportion to the entertainment afforded; so that numbers of persons think it *worth while* to take a ticket, for once in a way, just to hear "His Royal Highness" speak, and to get a good dinner and wine cheaper than they can on any other occasion. After dinner, when the wine has gone round just enough to raise the spirits and warm the heart, and when two or three songs have been sung by public singers engaged for that purpose, the chairman rises and explains to the meeting the state of the society—details the good it has effected during the past year—the added calls that are likely to be made on its means during the next—and appeals to the *known generosity of Englishmen* to enable those calls to be answered. He then signifies how happy he shall be to receive and record the names of new subscribers, or of additional sums from those who have already con-

tributed. The idea of having one's name handed up to a "Royal Duke," and read aloud by him to an assembled company of four or five hundred persons, and applauded by them—for applause, in the shape of clapping of hands and knocking of glasses against the table, follows every name thus read, and is loud in proportion to the sum contributed; this, added to the spurious generosity excited by a more than ordinary quantity of the juice of the grape, is, as before, not to be resisted. A guinea is not much, especially when one recollects that he has just been expending nearly that sum on a good dinner; and it's worth half the money to hear one's name proceed from royal lips: so the money and the name are put down together, and the new subscriber returns home more than half tipsy, to swear at his servants, beat his children, make his wife unhappy, and congratulate himself on his growing humanity.

I have stated all this to you because it is, I think, very characteristic; and because I know that you may depend on it's being an unexaggerated account of the manner in which is raised by far the greater proportion of those enormous funds which are required for the support of the public charities of England—and of London in particular. I repeat, personal vanity is the source of an Englishman's

very best actions, to say nothing of his worst. There is no such thing as a spontaneous feeling even of good will, much less of self sacrificing benevolence, to be met with in this country; at all events not in a greater degree than in any other. Englishmen have therefore no pretensions whatever to lay claim to exclusive credit on this score. The proud and unrivalled distinction resulting to England as a nation, from her publ[illegible] charities, must be attributed entirely to the skil[illegible] zeal, and benevolence of a comparatively few individuals, who have found the means of turning her private wealth and her national weaknesses to so noble an account. You have seen too, in a former letter, that the great public works which are undertaken in this country by means of strictly private funds, owe their origin to much the same mixture of selfishness and vanity. The promoters of them either hope to gain a profit on the sums they advance, or like to feel that they have had a hand in such works.

Among the other prominent features presented by the English character, as it is seen in promiscuous intercourse, I have said that it is cold, hard, coarse, ignorant, and heartless. Having taken upon myself the unpleasant task of sketching this character, I must not do it by halves; though I am

inclined to think you will feel as little pleasure in reading this letter as I have in writing it. But the cruel injustice that has been done to our own country by English travellers, both in private communications, and in published works on this subject, and the obvious effect they have produced on the national feeling towards us, make it a piece of at least excusable severity in our own travellers, if not of national justice, to give in return an unflattered portrait of England,—though *here*, no doubt, that portrait would be regarded as any thing rather than a *likeness*, precisely because it *is* unflattered: for, like all vain people, the English are more susceptible of flattery, and less capable of bearing to hear the truth told of themselves, than any other nation.

You must observe, however, that what I have said of an Englishman's vanity regards him individually as a man—not as the member of a nation. The French are probably, *as a nation*, the vainest people on the face of the earth. But their's is a broad, collective, national feeling. They are vain of France as France; and of themselves as part of her. But the English vanity is a narrow, paltry, conceited, and merely *personal* feeling; a thing growing out of, and centering in self alone. About the nation, and its power and glory, they know

very little, and care less; except in so far as they feel that that power and glory are reflected in themselves, (as the sun is reflected in a drop of dirty water,) and as this affords a means of gratifying the merely personal feeling of which I am speaking. They are vain of themselves as individual Thomsons and Johnsons, and of the English nation because it is *their* nation; not of themselves because they are members of *it*. An Englishman's feelings on this head spring from and are modified by his own personal identity: whereas a Frenchman has scarcely a feeling of personal identity at all, when his country is in question: it is lost in his intense and absorbing sense of her honor and happiness, (these are a Frenchman's synonymes for power and glory) and his desire to promote and extend the influence of them. For example,—an Englishman has a contempt for his king, however good he may be; because the abstract idea of kingly power interferes with his personal consequence: a Frenchman idolizes his king, however bad he may be, provided he aggrandises the power and glory of his country. In fact, a Frenchman loves his country as he does his mistress—*because* she is his mistress, and because he thinks her lovely; and he would die for either. An Englishman also loves his country as he loves

his mistress; but it is because she is *his* mistress, and because he thinks she loves *him*. But as to dying for either, his vanity, (or as he would call it, his reason) tells him that *that* would be a very short-sighted method of promoting the interests and the happiness of either. In short, the essential difference between an Englishman's vanity and a Frenchman's is this,—that the Englishman's is always twin-born with selfishness, and is strong or weak in proportion to the strength or weakness of that; but the Frenchman's is never allied to selfishness at all, and cannot consort with it, or even share in the same dwelling.

I must consider all the other characteristics of an Englishman's mind and manners as secondary to, and in great degree springing out of, these primary ones, which I have described and endeavoured to illustrate. His hard and cold repulsiveness of manner is the natural consequence of shutting up his thoughts and feelings within the narrow boundary of self, and letting them for ever revolve in that miserably confined circle—where they can communicate with but one set of sensations and ideas, and acquire and retain but one set of recollections and associations. Why should he take the trouble to cultivate the graces of manner, when he cares nothing about any one's feelings

but his own? Why should he defer to the opinions of others, or refrain from asserting and maintaining his own with all the insolence of conscious superiority, when he *knows* that they are the best of all possible opinions, and not to be shaken even by conviction itself? I once met with an Englishman who, from observing that there is a daily flux and reflux of *tide* in the river Thames at London, had, for the moment, taken up a notion that tides were natural to all rivers: and he would persist in his opinion, and in quarrelling with me for presuming to differ from it! And this was a person in the most truly respectable class that belongs to English society; I mean that consisting of persons engaged in mercantile concerns, members of professions, &c. That even a well-informed man, (as the person I am speaking of really was) might accidentally, and for a moment, take up such a notion as this, from the circumstance I have referred to being constantly in his observation, and from his having consequently forgotten or overlooked the real fact, is quite conceivable. None will doubt this who take the trouble to examine the progress of their own minds, and the manner in which we acquire and retain accidental and desultory knowledge of this kind. I do not state the circumstance as a proof of *ignorance;* for, as I before said, the

person of whom I am speaking was a man of extensive general information, and could only for a moment have *forgotten* the fact in question. But to persist in maintaining, or rather in asserting the fact, merely because he had once stated it, was an example of coarse insolent obstinacy purely and exclusively English.

If I admit, to its fullest extent, the justice of the complaints that have been made by English travellers, as to the purely superficial character of the knowledge that is spread over society in France, I must consider the contented ignorance that I find to be absolutely universal in English society, and the affected, or still worse, the real contempt for knowledge, which accompanies it, as more than counterbalancing evils. A piece of water adds to the beauty of a prospect, however shallow it may be, because we are not obliged to enquire into its depth, before we admire the lights and reflections that it casts around. And so it is with French superficiality. It adds to the brilliance of society, without taking away from the solidity or the value of real acquirement; and it is at least a token of respect for knowledge, and a testimony to its worth. But if mere superficialness is bad enough, blank ignorance is infinitely worse; and contented ignorance, priding itself on its deficiencies, is more foolish, mischievous, and disgust-

ing than either, or than both. If the French have not the industry to amass knowledge, they have at least the sense to see its value, and the taste and skill to acquire just so much of it as may give them the appearance of possessing more; and they have so much tact in displaying what they *do* know, that it would be difficult, without a breach of the common rules of society, to expose their deficiencies. But the English are totally ignorant; and they make their want their boast. If you ask a well-dressed Englishman a question respecting a passage from one of his country's most distinguished poets, he'll tell you that "really, poetry is a thing he has no taste for;" if you allude to an event in the most familiar part of English history, he'll assure you that he has not looked into a book of history since he left school, but he dares to say that his little boy could have set the matter right if he had been at home. If science or art become the subject of reference, it is ten to one but he thanks God that he has no time to trouble his head about those kinds of pursuits. Politics, and the passing events of the day, are all that he knows, or pretends to know, any thing about; and of these he knows just so much as the newspaper he subscribes for tells him. It is not by the fruit which it produces, but by the nutriment on which it feeds, that you may know the tree here. If you know the newspaper that an English-

man reads, you may pretty confidently anticipate what he will have to say of passing events on any given day that you may happen to meet him. One thing, however, he is acquainted with—the state of the weather; and *that* he thinks nobody has the means of ascertaining but himself—for he'll tell you it's a wet day when the rain is pouring upon your head, and assure you that it's very fine, when the sun is shining full in your eyes!

One more distinguishing feature of English character, and I have done. English travellers loudly accuse Frenchmen of being insincere; and they prove it by telling you that they profess a kindness towards strangers which they do not feel. It is very certain that France cannot retort this charge upon England. An Englishman is the sincerest creature breathing; but his sincerity is a greater vice in him than the insincerity of which he accuses others. An Englishman never deceives you with a shew of goodwill, simply because he does not care a farthing about you, and has no wish that you should suppose he does. You may like him, or not, just as you please; it is a matter of perfect indifference to him, so long as your liking or dislike does not interfere with his personal interest. He does not think it *worth his while* to be insincere, because he could not gain by it what would be equivalent to the feeling of self-satisfied pride resulting from his sin-

cerity. In short, he *scorns* to be insincere; just as he scorns to tell a lie, or do a dishonest action. But I am afraid such truth, honesty, and sincerity as these are but poor substitutes for those springing from a real love and respect for abstract truth and justice. They are but coarse clumsy imitations, modified if not engendered by vanity and self-love.

I intended to notice the state of society, as connected with the English character; but this letter has reached to so much greater a length than I expected it would, that I must reserve my remarks on that part of the subject to a future letter. In the mean time I beg you not to forget that whatever I have said, or may still have to say, on these points, must be taken with great exceptions. I state the predominant impression which what I see is calculated to call forth; and perhaps I state it in a spirit in which *recrimination* may have some little share. That there are numerous and delightful exceptions to all I have noticed, it seems almost superfluous for me to add—for those exist in all countries; but perhaps there is no country in the civilized world that can boast so large a proportion of wise and enlightened individuals as England can, both in private and public life, and so many amiable and united family circles, where virtue and happiness are practised, felt and understood. You must bear in mind too, that I am all along speaking of that portion of English

society which may strictly be called the middle class, consisting of all the various degrees and orders included between the very highest and the very lowest. These latter are in all countries pretty much alike. It is this middle class which may be considered as forming, both in France and in England, the great body of the nation; but in England more than in any other country.

V. S.

LETTER XXXVIII.

I SHALL not stay to inquire whether the English character, as I described it to you in my last letter, is to be attributed to the state of society in this country, or vice versâ. Perhaps they mutually nourish, support, and modify each other. Certain it is, however, that whatever may be the relationship existing between them, they are of the same precious breed, and are in every respect worthy of each other. In fact, as far as society deserves that title, that is to say, as far as it regards man in the light of an intellectual, and not a merely gregarious animal, the English have, generally speaking, no such thing; and they scarcely seem to know what it means, much less to appreciate its value and effects. If they meet together at all, out of their own immediate family circle, it is not to observe or think—not to obtain a knowledge of other minds, and through others of their own—not to cultivate the social habits and affections which distinguish man from the inferior animals—not to extend the sphere of their enjoyments, and at the same time their capacity of contributing to the enjoyment of

others; in short, it is not to make themselves or others wiser, or better, or happier. If the English meet together, it is purely to indulge and pamper those vices and weaknesses which I have described as belonging to their character; it is to find food for the ever-craving appetite of their vanity, which would starve upon the resources which it meets with at home; it is to exercise that selfishness which we all possess to a certain degree, but which all are ashamed of, and would conceal, except an Englishman,—who thinks his honesty and sincerity compromised if he does not exhibit the defects of his character to all the world. It is one or other of these motives, added perhaps to a desire to promote his worldly interests by increasing his connections, and the mere impulse which belongs to him as a gregarious animal by nature, which ever takes an Englishman from his boasted *home*: which home, if he loves at all, it is because he sees nothing around him there but what is *his own*, and over which he is sole lord and master, and may domineer as he pleases.

The most characteristic exhibitions of social manners to be met with in England, are those evening parties which are at present so much in vogue among all ranks of the community, from the dowager countess in May-fair, down to the substantial tradesman's wife in her rural retreat at Hack-

ney. To these parties all are invited who can by any means be brought within the circle of the inviter's acquaintance; all they ever recollect to have met and spoken to during the present or the last season. And if these are not sufficient to fill the apartments to suffocation, more must by some means or other be procured through the medium of friends; because, for the apartments *not* to be full, would indicate that your house was large enough to accommodate all your acquaintance—which it would be an affront to suppose for a moment. For the accommodation of these visitors, servants are hired for the night to wait, lamps to light the rooms, chairs for the guests to sit on by turns, and glasses for them to drink wine and water and lemonade out of; these, and a few cakes, being all that is usually given at these parties in the way of *entertainment*. As to the amusement that is to be found at them, the persons present must contrive this for themselves; for which purpose they may collect into groups, (those who are known to each other—for no others can, by the laws of etiquette, even speak together) and criticise the dress, manners, and persons of those about them; or they may take a hand at cards, if room can be found to place a table; or they may blunder through a quadrille, if eight persons can be got together who know how, and one who will hammer them a tune on the piano, near

which there is generally a small space reserved for this purpose—to effect which, however, some of the company are obliged to be content with reaching no farther than the passage, or half way up the stairs. They have all this choice of amusement, which some of them *vary*, by going from one party to another in the course of the same evening: for your experienced *routers* frequently arrive at the honour of having *invites* to two or three different parties in the same evening; and they make a point of going to them all, in order that they may have an opportunity of saying at each that they have been or are going to the others. On these occasions the master and mistress of the house give themselves as little trouble about what is going forward as the guests do about them. If you get a sight of them, and a nod from them, once during the evening, its all very well; if not, so much the better,—seeing that the gentility of these meetings is to be estimated by the difficulty of breathing and moving about!

Before taking a most willing leave of these tiresome and ill-contrived parties, I ought not to omit mentioning that, if at all of them, from the highest to the lowest, you meet with persons, of both sexes, worse dressed, and more vulgar in mind and manner, than are usually to be found among any other similar classes of society in Europe,—you also meet

with a very great proportion of an opposite description; particularly among the females. And I must confess, upon the whole, the perfection of the human face and form, and of the dress that is adapted to aid and heighten the effect of these, is to be met with here oftener than anywhere else that I have been.

The only kind of English social meetings at which is to be found any thing like intellectual intercourse, are small dinner parties, consisting of from eight to twenty persons of both sexes. In the invitations to these parties the dinner hour is mentioned, and you are not expected to go till about half an hour after that time. On arriving you are shown into a drawing-room up stairs, where the company assemble; and the moment the whole are arrived, dinner is announced, and you are led to a room on the ground-floor, where you are directed to a particular chair by the master or mistress of the house; your seat being near to, or distant from the latter, in proportion as you are a stranger, or to the respect that is intended to be shewn you. During dinner there is no time or opportunity for conversation, as the table is covered before you sit down; and though Englishmen eat comparatively little, and Englishwomen almost nothing, yet from the awkward and ill-contrived arrangements of the table, and the miserably deficient manner in which

English servants fulfil their office, there is always something to call on your attention, either in assisting those who are near you, or in calling and waiting for what you want. Since the intercourse between England and the continent, it has become a pretty general custom to hand round French wines two or three times during dinner; besides which the gentlemen frequently partake of those strong colonial wines which are so little used among us. It is an invariable rule, however, never to take wine of this kind without asking either a lady or gentleman to take it with you. It is usual for the lady never to refuse when thus asked, though she may have never before seen the person asking her; but she seldom drinks what she takes into her glass, merely bowing silently to the gentleman, and putting the wine to her lips. All this you will think silly and unmeaning enough.

When the cloth is removed, the dessert is placed on the table, together with foreign wines of various kinds—chiefly those colonial ones which are drank during dinner, and the Englishman's favourite *Port*, or Oporto wine. There is generally French wine also, for the few who prefer it. It is at this period of the meeting that these kind of parties might be made very agreeable sources of social intercourse. But the English have really no notion of any thing of the sort. They worse than idle the time away,

either in relations of the occurrences of the past day or week, which every one present is acquainted with; or in discussing the merits of the weather, and its probable effect on the prices of the necessaries of life, which no one present cares any thing about; or in arguing and disputing about the politics of every country in Europe, without any one present having a single distinct notion of what is going forward in any one country, even their own. As to Literature and Art, they are scarcely ever by any accident mentioned; unless it should so happen that Lord Byron, or the author of the Scotch Novels, has just produced a new work; or the Exhibition at the Royal Academy should be open. In these cases every one present is bound to have something to say. In the former, those who have not read the new work lament and recount the accidents which have prevented them from procuring it; and those who have read it are decidedly of opinion that it is either better than the preceding work of the same author, or not so good; half the company usually adhering to one of these opinions, and half to the other! In case the Exhibition happens to be open, you have also numerous opinions on its comparative merits. These opinions, however, are not so various as they are numerous, being generally at once summary and comprehensive, and determining the point in question by the

fact of whether the said Exhibition includes a greater or less number of *portraits* than it did last year: and on this point, too, the opinions are in general pretty equally divided! It is but fair to confess, however, that on these occasions you not unfrequently meet with persons, even among the females, who will go so far as to state their conviction that Mr. Wilkie's picture is certainly "very clever," and Mr. Chantry's sculpture "very sweet;" and that the blue China jar on the mantle-piece, in the former work, is "very natural," and the snowdrop in the hand of the sleeping infant in the latter, is "very pretty!" You will see by all this there is no denying the fact that, in mixed English society, you do *not* meet with that merely superficial knowledge of literature and art which is so loudly complained of in the French. You will see, also, what you *do* meet with in its place.

When the wine has passed round a few times, the females, as you know, retire to the drawing-room, and the gentlemen remain for about two hours after that. It is now that, if any one present *has* any thing to say, inspired by the presence of the wine and the absence of the ladies, he contrives to say it: for the presence of females always represses rather than encourages an Englishman's vivacity and volubility. The latter part of these evenings, which are usually prolonged till two or

three in the morning, is spent in the drawing-room, in cards, music, &c.

In short, without going farther into detail on this uninviting subject, nothing can be more *triste* and un-*spirituel*, than what is called a *mixed company* in England, of whatever kind or class it may be. It exhibits, generally speaking, a total absence of that solid sense and manly feeling which the English nation is said to possess in so eminent a degree; and this absence is not compensated for by any of that airiness and elasticity of spirit, and that *gaieté de cœur*, which are the light and life of the same kind of society in France.

There is, however, one kind of social intercourse to be met with in England, which remains to be described, and which if you happen to be fortunate in your choice of acquaintance, is very delightful indeed; and which is also totally different from and superior to anything of the kind to be met with on the Continent. I mean that intercourse subsisting between intimate friends of congenial habits, feelings, and studies, who *drop in*, as the phrase is, at each other's houses of an evening, and are always welcome to each other, and always find subjects of pleasant and enlightened talk. This is a kind of society quite peculiar to England, and arising out of the domestic habits of the better

educated classes of the people. M—— is particularly fortunate in this kind of society; and it is in this way—chiefly at his own house, but sometimes at those of his friends—that I am in the habit of hearing and joining in discussions and opinions on various subjects connected with the Belles Lettres and the Arts; these being the favourite subjects of attention in the circle of friends of which I am now speaking. It is in this most agreeable, and to me instructive intercourse, that I have gained, and am from time to time gaining, the greater part of the information I hope to be able to detail to you hereafter, on subjects connected with English literature and art; and it is here that I have, above all, been led to acquire those opinions and feelings on the subject of English poetry, and of poetry in general—but particularly that of the present day—which will be so entirely new to you when I come to write you on these subjects; and which have, in fact, caused so entire a revolution, or rather have erected for me so entirely new a fabric, in these mental regions of beauty and delight. On all subjects except this I expect to return to you after my long absence, with as little of the *Anglo-mania* as can well belong to any one; but on this one subject you must not be surprised if you find me totally changed in every essential respect, and possessed of feelings and opinions

as little French, and as decidedly and entirely English, as if I were "native here, and in a manner born to them." (You see I cannot even help already quoting English poetry, to you who do not yet understand it.) I give you fair warning, too, that I shall return prepared and determined to leave no means untried of instilling into the inmates of V—— similar opinions and feelings: for however rich and inexhaustible may be the source of delight and instruction which these feelings and opinions have opened to me, I shall have but little inducement or inclination to avail myself of it, unless those I love can be persuaded of its value, and enabled to share it with me.

Among the persons who frequent M——'s house in the manner I have described above, are two or three of the most pleasing and popular of the living poets, and several of the best prose writers. Besides these, the circle chiefly consists of artists, and members of the legal profession; these classes of persons being almost the only ones among which is diffused a general acquaintance with and taste for subjects connected with polite literature.

After having now fulfilled my not very pleasant task, of describing to you the kind of English character and society spoken of in my last letter, and in the beginning of this, I must not any longer delay to make you acquainted with the other and

brighter side of the picture. In order to do this in a way most easy and pleasant to myself, (and I am sure it will be most agreeable to you,) I shall in my next letter describe to you the characters of M—— and his family, as examples of the kind of persons that are to be met with in England, as well as in all other countries; but perhaps in England, oftener and in a greater degree of perfection than anywhere else.

V. S.

LETTER XXXIX.

I FEEL that I have too long delayed to tell you something of the friends we are staying with; for I am certain that, as there will be no other part of my letters you will take so much pleasure in reading, so there will be none that it will be so agreeable to me to write.

You know I have a (perhaps foolish) reluctance to apply the term *friend* lightly. It is true that the usages of society sanction the perpetual application of this term where it is not intended to convey any very distinct meaning. But, from a strong dislike to this habit, I have always contrived to keep clear of it. And I think this has not been without its advantages to me. He to whom all his acquaintance are *friends*, seldom has any friends at all; just as he who *loves* this or that trifle better than he loves the other, is seldom capable of really loving any thing. We must keep possession of a few words that are actually *things*; otherwise we shall be in danger of discovering, when it is too late, that all things are merely *words*. If we would retain any command in the

kingdom of our own minds, we must keep at least one little corner of them as a citadel where the conventional forms of society may not enter; one impregnable strong-hold to which our hopes and aspirations may retire, when pressed on all sides by that triumphant army of which custom is at once the creator and the king. When, therefore, I use the word "friends," with reference to M—— and his family, you will know that it is intended to express a great deal. Indeed, out of the circle of our own fire-side, I have not met with any thing in actual life at all equal to the three persons of whom this delightful little family consist; M——, his mother, and a young girl, an adopted daughter of M——'s mother.

I shall speak of M—— first, because I have seen most of him, and because he is evidently considered as the head of the little community: a distinction which the admiring homage of the rest of its members forces upon him, and which he rather suffers than uses or enjoys. And yet I can see that he sometimes cannot help being delighted with it, from knowing that it is the willing and eager tribute of admiration engendered by love.

M—— is one of those few human beings who have not only escaped the polluting influence of the circumstances in which they have been placed, but have contrived to turn every thing to a good

account. All his life an inhabitant of this commercial metropolis, and himself the only son of a man devoted to commerce, he has, at the death of his father, chosen at once to abandon the prospect, or rather the certainty of worldly aggrandisement, and with a comparatively small competence, has retired from the conflict, not because he feared the combat, but because he had the rare foresight to discover that it was a struggle in which victory would have been defeat, and the still rarer resolution to act upon that conviction. Indeed *decision* is the most striking feature of M——'s character. The fixed opinions that he forms are remarkably few; partly from the difficulty of completely satisfying himself as to the truth, on any given point; and partly from the little good that he finds to result from mere speculative faith on any general subject. But on the few points which do influence our conduct in life, as it respects ourselves and others, he has formed for himself a set of principles from which he never swerves. These principles absolutely hold the place of oracles in his mind, and like those of old, are generally silent on the common affairs of every day life: but, when he does see cause to apply to them, he listens to their responses with the most unquestioning faith, and follows wherever they lead, regardless of all consequences.

M—— has seen more of the world than any man of his age I ever met with; and he has used his knowledge of it to better purposes. From a perpetual habit of contemplating the nature of man in its inherent instead of its accidental qualities, he has entirely avoided that hatred and contempt, which are so likely to ensue when an ardent and sensitive mind like his is compelled to seek its food and its employment in the midst of that state of society which always exists in a great commercial city like this. But his mental organs seem to be endowed with the rare power of converting poison to nourishment; for a union of all things in the highest degree artificial has produced in him the most natural of characters. Every thing evil seems to have engendered in him its direct opposite: the constant example of mere money-getters has taught him the true value of money; from living in unceasing contact with all that is hateful in manners, principles, and actions, he has learned to cherish kindly feelings towards all the world; the perpetual presence of every thing that is false in feeling and in fact has created in him the most pure taste and the most unaffected love for all that is simple, natural, and true. It may seem a little paradoxical to trace these effects to causes apparently so very unlikely to produce them; and in fact I do not mean to state them

absolutely as effects, but only as very remarkable consequences.

As I learn from M——'s conversation, it is only within this very short time that his character and habits have assumed any thing like a fixed position, and that his mode of life can be said to have resulted from deliberate choice. But since the death of his father, every thing has depended on himself; and he tells me that the plan, (if it can be called a plan) of his future life, is now completely settled in his own mind—at least as far as it is independent of circumstances over which he can have no controul. And though the choice that he has made is of all others the rarest, I think that upon the whole it is the very wisest and best that can be made. Ambition M—— believes, and I think justly, to be the source of almost all the guilt and misery that exist in the world. It is found in an almost equal degree in every station of life; and though disguised under a thousand different names and modifications, is almost the exclusive spring of human action, in what is called a highly cultivated state of society, such as that in which we live at present. It is the demon which haunts and torments all mankind, from the beggar to the king: and though it is the creator of these apparent distinctions, as well as of all the intermediate ones, yet, in point of fact, it places all

mankind on a level, for it makes them all miserable. The one essential necessity of the very nature of a man of the world (a character formed by and peculiar to the state of society of which I speak) is *to be* that which he *is not*, and *to have* that which he *has not;* and it is this necessity which makes him a slave to circumstances: and when he *is* a slave, what matters it who or what is his master? A beggar's dog, if he has food and shelter, is as well off as a king's; and what is there to choose between the baby a span long, who sits on its mother's arm and cries for the moon, and the conqueror who stands bestriding one world and weeping for another? I have lately thought about this more than ever I did before; or rather I had never *thought* much about it before, though I had felt on the subject nearly as M—— does. But since I *have* thought about it, I cannot enough admire the wisdom that could urge such a choice as he has made, and the resolution that could, in spite of so many temptations to the contrary, put it in execution. M—— is convinced that we have no chance of being happy without entire mental freedom; and that the only way to retain that is to keep full possession of ourselves, by having no fixed pursuit whatever, but by living a life of entire leisure. *This*, therefore, has been his choice. And, to prevent the possibility of being

diverted from it, he has, at a great comparative loss, realized his actual property; thus reducing his income to less than one-fifth of what it would have been, if he had chosen to carry on the commercial concern which came into his hands at the death of his father.

But I am dwelling much longer on this part of the subject than I intended. I merely meant to illustrate M——'s character by telling you the manner in which he passes his time. He never makes any resolutions, or acts on any fixed prospective plan; but yields, in almost every thing, to the impulses which come to him from the external circumstances of the moment, and from within himself. As these urge and direct him, he is engaged in either contemplation, or study, or conversation, or mere amusement, or even mere idleness. But his chief and favourite employment is the cultivation of those tastes which are connected with the exercise of the fancy and the imagination; and these are so various in themselves that they give a perpetual variety to his thoughts and feelings; for he never allows himself to remain employed about any one of them long enough to exhaust its power of giving pleasure. He flies from book to book, or from one subject of contemplation to another, as the bee does from flower to flower, and extracts honey from them all; and yet touches so lightly

upon all, that when he returns to any one of them, it still retains all the charms of freshness. For instance, in reading poetry, which, after all, is his chief delight, he *makes a point*, as he himself expresses it, of never recollecting a single beautiful passage, except as to its general subject; so that, when he accidentally meets with the same passage again, it comes upon him with the double charm of novelty and yet of acquaintanceship. "For I read," he says, "that I may think and feel, not that I may talk." There is another happy art by which he at all times avails himself of his best powers and resources. This is, never to set himself doggedly and determinately to any thing, but always to adapt the employment of the hour to the mood of mind in which he may happen to be at that hour. This habit of indulging his mind in what may almost be called its whims and fancies, is perhaps not without its disadvantages. It may create the appearance of caprice and instability, or perhaps even the reality. But is not this in itself a source of pleasure? And as for the *appearance*, we live by our own thoughts and feelings, not by other people's. M—— will sometimes try half a dozen different employments in as many minutes, and abandon them all; but he is sure to find *the right* at last. He will one minute be walking about in silent meditation, the next singing a favourite air;

then he'll take up a book, read a page or two, and lay it aside again and sit down to the piano; or perhaps walk out into the streets, in the unceasing din of which he finds a more complete abstraction than anywhere else; or mount his horse and ride into the country, without having thought of it a moment beforehand. Indeed I have heard him say that he never feels such perfect freedom and buoyancy of spirit as when he is galloping about on an open heath, alone, and without thought or object.

You will observe that I have hitherto been speaking of that part of M——'s character which refers to himself alone; and perhaps I cannot better explain to you at once the remarkable degree in which, in this respect, he differs from other people, than by saying that, generally speaking, the pursuits of others, all that they do and think and feel, have a prospective reference to some distant and indefinite end, which is for ever flying before them, and which they never reach; whereas his pursuits are all complete in themselves, because, in one word, they are *not means but ends*.

But the part of M——'s character which is exhibited in his intercourse with others, differs as much from that part of his own which I have just described, as this latter does from that of other people. He cannot be said to be fond of society,

and never willingly associates with any but persons in whom he can find some qualities that deserve respect and love; but when he is with these, or with his own immediate friends, his personal character seems to be totally merged and lost for the time in a disposition to adapt himself to them. He has then no wish, or will, or opinion of his own. He is a talker or a listener, just as he sees that either of these characters will best please his companions; but generally the latter: for the end and object of all conversation now-a-days is, to hear one's self talk, and *this* is not one of M——'s sources of pleasure. I have seen him sit for an hour together, listening, with the most patient and apparently pleased attention, to the merest prosing; convinced that in doing so he is giving, and is therefore himself enjoying, more real pleasure than if he were to pour forth a strain of the most brilliant wit, or the most original eloquence: and this is always done without the least appearance of effort, or the least air of superiority. All the part he takes in a conversation of this kind is, to give his assent to any remarks that he may think true, and to help it on a little when it flags. This is so universally M——'s practice in mixed society, that though he thinks on all subjects with more originality than any man I ever met with, yet nine persons out of ten leave his company with the impres-

sion that he is a very quiet, good-natured, sensible, common-place sort of person like themselves; so little does he endeavour or wish to shine. But, in fact, society, like all his other pursuits and occupations, is, with him, an end in itself, not a means.

But he does talk sometimes, among his own immediate friends and family, where he knows that he shall give more pleasure than by listening; and then it is that all the finer and more striking parts of his mental character become visible;—his deep and intense admiration of moral beauty under every form and modification, and his exquisite tact in detecting and appreciating it; his pure and ardent love for truth, and his determination to follow that wherever it may lead him, regardless of consequences; and above all, his fine and fearless enthusiasm on all subjects that he thinks worthy of it—an enthusiasm which seems to have been strengthened and purified by his having lived in perpetual contact with a state of things calculated, as it should seem by the example of almost every one else, to indurate the feelings and pollute the very fountains of them. This last is the most remarkable and the most delightful feature of M——'s character. He has, as I before said, seen more of the world than any man of his age I ever met with, and yet he is less than all others what is called a man of the world.

M——'s education was, in the very early part of his life, entirely neglected; that is to say, he was taught when a boy what boys are usually taught, and then suffered to forget it as soon as he pleased. The deficiency which he feels in consequence of this neglect has been, I believe, his chief inducement to abandon any regular pursuit. But he regards this deficiency in his early education as a favourable circumstance rather than otherwise, since it has left him an unfailing source of mental occupation; for *this* he considers as the grand secret of human happiness in the present state of society. Study therefore, or not to call it by so formal a name, the cultivation of his own mind, is the sole employment of M——'s life. But, as I before hinted, his studies always refer to subjects connected with the affections, the imagination, and the fancy. The physical sciences he shuns as he would a pestilence; for it is one of his most fixed and cherished opinions, that, as it respects a man's self, the most unfortunate mental propensity that can be indulged in, is that of prying and investigating too closely into the physical causes of the natural phenomena which surround us: a disposition which forms that character described with such deep and eloquent contempt by M——'s favourite, Wordsworth, as one who is—

"————— all eyes;
Philosopher—a fingering slave—
One that would *peep and botanize*
Upon his mother's grave."

M—— was telling me, the other day, of what he called the escape that he once had from this perilous course of study. When he was quite a youth, the brilliant discoveries of Davy and others had made the study of the physical sciences, and particularly chemistry, extremely fashionable in this country. "The wonders of oxygen and hydrogen," said he, "became the theme of experiment and conversation from one end of Europe to the other; and I too, like the rest, must know something about them; so I began to attend lectures, and study the elementary books on the subject. And never shall I forget the effect they at first produced on me. I devoured their contents with a more eager appetite, a more intense interest, than had ever before been excited in me by the most high-wrought romance. I plunged into the stream, and absolutely abandoned myself to its current, sporting in its waves as in a new element, breathing the new atmosphere, and gazing on the flowers on all sides of me, and the sky above me, with a rapture I had never felt before: for the new world in which I found myself had all these peculiar to itself. What I felt was a sort of intoxication, such as I could fancy to result

from breathing the nitrous oxide of which I was then hearing and reading so much. Suddenly, however, I found that the stream to which I had trusted myself was bearing me onward to a precipice; and I had but just strength and resolution left to escape, before I arrived at the edge of it. I soon learned, too, that I had but just escaped in time; for when I got back to my own world again, I found that I was looking at it through a medium which changed and distorted all its accustomed features. A film seemed to have been placed before my mental sight, and I could scarcely recognise those objects which before had been my glory and delight; the contemplation of which had been the food of my moral existence. Or perhaps it would be more *philosophical* to say that a film had been *removed* from my eyes. But the effects were the same. While I was gazing upon the splendid pageantry of clouds attendant on a setting sun, and watching the perpetual changes in their ineffable beauties, I found I could not at first prevent from intruding into my thoughts a strange and desperate jargon about refracted and reflected light, its effects on the vapours which are supported by the atmosphere which surrounds the earth, and so forth! It was so with all the other appearances of external nature. I could not hear the thunder, or listen to the nightingale's song, or watch the moonlight glittering on

a stream of water, or the like, without being pestered with a confused notion of their *causes*, and a restless and impatient desire to pry into them. What had I to do with their causes? Their effects were enough for me, and all that was intended for me. In short, all that had before contributed to lift me *above* the earth, now filled me with an insane desire to dig, with my own hands, *downwards* to its centre. I have never since ceased to rejoice that I did not yield to the temptation of engaging in such dirty work; for certainly, before I had reached to the depth of a common grave, the ground would have fallen in upon me, and buried me alive."

It is another of M——'s singular, and rather startling opinions, that it is much better to know things superficially than profoundly: better, he means, with reference to the purpose of deriving pleasure from knowledge. And it is mere cant, after all, to pretend that *this* is not the immediate as well as the remote object of every one in acquiring knowledge. I shall not detail to you M——'s arguments in support of this opinion; for I am not very well satisfied with them myself; though they are sufficiently ingenious. But I should not enable you to judge fairly of M——'s character, if I neglected to tell you that, in most of the points in which he differs from the multitude,—particularly in these two latter, with respect to the advantage of

merely superficial knowledge, and the little value, or rather the mischief resulting from the study of the physical sciences,—he never thinks of stating his opinions as general propositions, but only as they bear upon his own immediate views and feelings. Indeed he never thinks of stating them at all, even as individual opinions, except under such circumstances as those in which they have happened to come out during our accidental conversations together. He holds to them firmly, as it regards himself, and acts upon them to the very utmost extent to which they can lead him; but he never obtrudes them on others, and never even thinks contemptuously of those who hold directly opposite ones. On the contrary, let but an opinion be sincere, and he respects it equally, whether he thinks the foundations of it true or false: for if he loves one thing more than all others it is sincerity, and if he hates—but he does not *hate* any thing. Indeed he carries this passion for sincerity (or rather it carries him) so far, that while he has been execrating certain doctrines as in the highest degree false and pernicious, I have heard him stop short to express his respect and admiration for the promulgator of those doctrines, because he believed him to be sincere.

Such, my dear Claire, is a slight and imperfect sketch of the man for whom I have already formed

what I venture to believe will be a deep and lasting friendship; at least such are a few of the fair features of his character. That he has faults and failings like the rest of us, I expect—I had almost said I *hope:* for if he has not, I can have little expectation that our friendship can be mutual; and unless it *be* mutual, it cannot be at all. That he *has* faults, *he* would be the very first to feel and to confess; as he would be the very last to recognise himself in the character that I have here drawn of him.

One fault, and only one, I have as yet discovered in him; and that I shall mention, lest you should fancy that my incipient liking for one part of his character has blinded me to all the rest. He cannot be said to be of a *sociable* disposition, and obviously shuns any thing like a general intercourse with the world. The minds of his fellow beings constitute, as it were, a foreign region, in which he likes occasionally to travel and to expatiate; but the cherished resting-place of his thoughts, their temple and their home, is the ideal world which his imagination has created in the recesses of his own spirit, and the depth of his own heart. This has given to his manner an abstraction and reserve which are extremely repulsive to strangers; and these are accompanied by an apparent consciousness, which gives to him, among those who do not know him,

an air of proud and almost contemptuous superiority. This latter, however, refers to his looks alone; and it is, I am convinced, quite involuntary, and arises from the predominant character of his thoughts having impressed, as it invariably does, its corresponding expression on his countenance.

I will finish this sketch of M——'s character by adding that it contains more *poetry*, abstractedly speaking, and as it regards himself, than that of any other person I ever met with. He holds a more perpetual intercourse with an imaginary world, has more ideal purity of thought and feeling, and his hopes and aspirations are more free, lofty, and enthusiastic; at the same time, the principles which are the spring of his actual conduct in life as it respects others, are more firm and inflexible

I have written you a very long letter about a person who is at present unknown to you. But I shall not pretend to fear that it will be uninteresting to you. I am sure it will not.

In my next I shall describe to you the other two members of this charming family; and I hope to make you know and like them as well as I do myself. Though if this latter were my *only* wish, I could perhaps compass it in a much shorter way, by telling you that their treatment of me, ever since I have been here, has been more like that of a brother than of a stranger and a foreigner.

V. S.

LETTER XL.

The ideal perfection of the female character is of a nature to require very few words to describe it; and the nearer it approaches to that perfection, the less can be said about it. The persons to whom I am writing will hardly feel the extent of the meaning that I would convey, when I say that, *out of our own house*, I never had an opportunity of contemplating any thing in real life which approached so near to that perfection as I now have, in the persons with whom I am living in daily intercourse; a kind of intercourse, too, that has, I think, enabled me to judge as correctly of them as if I had passed my life in their society. M——'s mother and her adopted daughter are in reality one character. They can scarcely be thought of separately, by those who know them both. Though superficial observers would probably discover no resemblance between them, yet there is in fact no difference, except the necessary ones resulting from thirty years difference in age. They have the same exquisite purity and refinement of feeling, the same ardent and enthusiastic love for all that has even the semblance of goodness or beauty, and the same delicate and in-

tuitive tact in the discovery of them, the same delightfully natural simplicity of taste, the same wishes, the same hopes, the same fears, and (I will add) the same faults.

I never witnessed so perfect a unity and communion of disposition. There is but one point on which they differ; and in that very difference, direct as it is, they resemble each other. It is this, that each thinks as humbly of herself as she does highly of the other.

Mrs.—— is about fifty years of age, and has the appearance of having possessed considerable personal beauty. But while there is a faded and melancholy character in her countenance, which has apparently been impressed on it by past circumstances of her life, and which makes her look older than she is, there is at the same time something about it which gives an evidence of extreme youthfulness of mind. And, in fact, *this* is the peculiar feature of her character. During a perpetual intercourse with the world, and with very few opportunities of even keeping alive a taste for natural pleasures, she has yet preserved that taste in all its original purity; or rather, it has remained with her, without any effort on her part to retain it. She still continues to regard the forms and influences of the external world with the eyes and the feelings of a child, on whose senses they

are just bursting forth with all the beauty of newness. There is a freshness and simplicity about all her thoughts and feelings, which is scarcely ever to be found after very early youth: and particularly in a female. The heat and activity of the fancy, and the force of imagination, sometimes enable men to carry onward to after life the feelings and faculties of youth. But in women—the very essence of whose character is to feel and to suffer, not to think and to act—this is very rarely the case. This concentration of the mental powers in one direction, that of actual impulse, is naturally calculated to wear away and destroy not only themselves, but the track over which they pass—not only the capability to be excited, but the exciting power in external objects. With her, however, this law seems to have been suspended or set aside; or rather, indeed, totally reversed; for time and habit have strengthened instead of weakening her susceptibility of receiving pleasure from even the simplest and most inartificial objects—the very same class of objects from which she received the same impressions in childhood; and those impressions, every time they are renewed, seem to acquire a renewed vividness and power. She looks upon a beautiful flower with the same innocent and unaffected delight that she did forty years ago; but that delight is now

modified and heightened by perpetually increasing feelings of admiration and love. She hails every returning birth-night of the moon, with the same quiet yet earnest joy that she did when first her newly awakened spirit owned its mysterious bridal with the visible world; but what she then used to gaze at only as a lovely crescent of light, now comes before her in all the radiant glory of a heavenly visitant, yet all the breathing beauty of an earthly one, and brings in its train a pomp of self-multiplying associations, created by memory, and rendered immortal by hope.

The chief, and indeed the only fault of Mrs. ——'s character, (I must mention the defects in my pictures, or I am afraid you'll not pay very implicit attention to my judgment as to their beauties) is one that arises entirely from a peculiarly susceptible organization. In fact she is of an extremely nervous and irritable temperament; the effects of which give an appearance of haste and impatience to her manner, and make her life (more than that of any other person I know) a perpetual alternation between exquisite happiness and exquisite misery.

I shall now add the finishing figure to this family picture; without which, indeed, it would be no more complete than a landscape would without a sky. You will then be able to fancy

yourselves in the midst of us; for C—— and I seem to be felt, and feel ourselves to be, as much a part of the family at present as if we really did belong to it.—I anticipate the significant smiles that will pass from one to another, when you begin to read the part of this letter in which I shall speak of E——; at least if I am at all able to express what I think of her; and I know that A—— will be the first to begin them. But let me tell her that I am not to be frightened by those smiles now. There *was* a time when they used to startle and bewilder me. If I met them unexpectedly, they used to flash upon the current of my thoughts like a sudden burst of moonlight on a midnight stream—changing the darkness into sparkling and living light. But the stream ran still darker by the contrast, when the light had left it, and seemed more likely than ever to be lost in its wanderings. That wild and wayward stream has since been tamed and embanked into a sober and silent canal. But it now basks in the same light all along its course; and if the changes that have been wrought in it have made it something less sparkling and picturesque, they have left it infinitely more quiet, useful, and happy.

"What!" (I hear her exclaim) "has the memory of the little dim pole-star of our absent mariner, hid as it is in the mists of distance, had

the power to withdraw his attention from the actual presence of this bright and newly discovered planet, that he was going to describe to us?" It has indeed: for though the one may and will beautify his path for ever, it is the other alone that can point out that path, and lead him onward to the true haven of his hopes.

But to return to his subject. What will *some persons* say, and others think, of his taste and gallantry, when he not only thinks but dares to *say* he thinks, that E—— is without exception the most finished example of feminine loveliness, both in mind and person, that he ever yet beheld?

Do not mistake me, however. I have seen more beautiful faces and finer forms—I have heard more touching and musical voices—I have met with more wit and accomplishments, in others; and as much ease, grace, gaiety, and good temper. But I never have seen and heard such a face and person and voice, such wit and accomplishments, and such ease, grace, gaiety and good temper, combined in any *one* human being.

E—— is twenty years of age, so that the very first flush of youth has passed away; but it has been succeeded by something the influence of which, if not so magically seductive at the first glance, is infinitely more touching and permanent. Her face, though full of beauties,

is by no means regularly beautiful. Its shape is almost a perfect oval. The fore-head is the very finest I ever saw—remarkably high and broad, and as smooth, white, and transparent as marble; and is shaded by large, light auburn curls. Her eyes are large, and much darker than those which usually accompany a fair complexion; and there is an expression about them that is, as far as I have seen, peculiar to themselves. I was going to say that they are like dove's eyes, but that would be nonsense, for I never observed what a dove's eyes are like; but the expression of them appears to me exactly like that of the figure of the dove descending from heaven, used in an allegorical sense, in some of Guido's and Carlo Dolce's pictures; they tell of the same ineffable softness—the same fragrant purity—the same unchangeable peace. The rest of the features are not well formed, or very remarkable in any particular, except the mouth; about which there is perpetually playing a distant and scarcely perceptible smile, blending with the ever-shifting but inextinguishable light of intellect and good-nature. Her figure is rather above the middle height; and, according to the present style of taste and dress, it may be considered as rather too slight in proportion. But I think that this circumstance adds to rather than diminishes

the effect of her face, person, and manner, as a whole. It confirms and heightens that etherial expression which is the peculiar character of her beauty. She seems to be clothed in an atmosphere of her own; a kind of misty light seems to radiate from her, and to repel the approaches of every thing that is not kindred to itself, every thing impure and earthly: a veil which is transparent as crystal to the mental sight, but through which the eye of the mere senses cannot pierce at all.

Such is the person of this lovely creature. And I really think that the description is not an exaggerated one. I mean, of course, with reference to the feelings of those who are qualified to appreciate this peculiar kind of beauty. It is a kind that addresses itself almost exclusively to the imagination; and it therefore requires some portion of this quality to be able to feel it at all; and a considerable portion to be susceptible of all its power. Shew Raphael's celebrated Dresden Madonna to a clown or a mechanic, and he will see in it nothing but a *female face.* Shew the same to a rake or a receiver-general, and he will only recognise the portraiture of a *devilish pretty woman.* But does it therefore follow that that splendid creation of human genius is not worthy of all, and more than all, the most rapturous admiration of its most enthusiastic worshippers? It might as well be said, because the

blind cannot see the rainbow, and the deaf cannot hear Mozart's music, that, therefore, these things do not exist.

I have little to add as to the mental character of E——. I told you that she resembles her mother (so she feels and calls her) in almost every thing. There is one exception, however:—that of temper. And how shall I speak of that? Shall I dare to tell you that it is even more serene, more equable, more balmy, than *any* one other that I know? The most perfect symbol of it that I can think of is a little unknown lake that I have seen, nearly at the summit of some of the highest Alps; which is so situated as never to be ruffled into any other expression than that of smiles; it is so transparent that you can see to the very bottom of it; and it reflects no other objects than the flowers on its banks, the sunshine, the stars, and the sky

V. S.

LETTER XLI.

I HAVE just returned from a visit to Windsor Castle, and as it unexpectedly turns out to be incomparably the finest thing I have seen in England, except St. Paul's, I hasten to give you an account of it. The road to Windsor being perfectly flat all the way, offers nothing worthy of particular notice, till you arrive within a short distance of the town and castle themselves; when the latter, which is situated on an eminence, forms a noble and majestic object of sight during the last three or four miles: the more so, perhaps, from its not presenting, at any one point of view, any thing like a regular or uniform appearance, but changing its shape and aspect at every turn of the road; yet always retaining the same character and expression, namely, that of the somewhat rude, but extensive stronghold of a powerful and warlike chief, constructed in feudal times, when the terms *might* and *right* were more openly synonymous than they are at present; and, moreover, when strength was considered as beauty, and beauty strength. Windsor Castle, except when seen from its immediate vicinity,

presents more the appearance of a citadel or acropolis, than the single residence even of a monarch; and such, in fact, it is,—the numerous dependants, &c. which are attached to an establishment of this kind, all having their dwellings within the walls which run round the outward precincts of the castle itself: the whole forming a town within a town. As the outside of this truly royal residence offers by far the most striking subject of remark, I shall principally notice that; premising, that all I had occasion to say of the other English palaces, is any thing but true of this; which, indeed, compensates for them all, and is, without exception, the most princely edifice I have seen in Europe. There is, however, a rude and inartificial character about it, so entirely different from all other palaces, that it cannot properly be made a subject of comparison with any of them, but rather of contrast. Ornament and regularity are usually the most striking features of edifices of this kind; but Windsor Castle is entirely without either of these qualities. Ornament, in particular, it seems to disclaim altogether; and the absence of this it is which gives the peculiar and characteristic appearance to it. It is literally constructed of hewn stone; small square blocks, about the size of those with which the streets of Paris are paved, being the sole material used in it, and these being not more regularly

worked than those to which I have compared them, or more artificially put together. I speak, of course, of the external parts merely. I should have conceived beforehand, that the effect of this would have been totally poor and bad; but, in fact, directly the reverse is the case. It gives to the whole building a somewhat barbarous, but at the same time a natural and proud simplicity, at once impressive in itself, and admirably indicative of the times in which it was constructed, and the purposes to which it was intended to be applicable. The space occupied by the castle and the various offices and buildings attached to it, is of great extent. The principal entrance is through a low arched gateway, flanked by solid towers, which leads immediately to a court-yard of irregular form, partly surrounded by low buildings of different kinds, which serve as the residences of the servants and dependants of the palace. Immediately opposite this principal entrance stands the royal chapel of St. George; which, though on a small scale, is, without exception, the most rich and perfect specimen of Gothic architecture I have ever seen; particularly the interior, of which I shall speak hereafter. At another extremity of this open space, behind a low wall which was formerly fortified, (as indeed all the castle was,) rises a lofty mound, apparently an artificial one, clothed with

beautifully preserved turf, and studded with shrubs and evergreens; and on the summit of this mound stands the celebrated Round Tower, in which several kings have been held captive,—particularly the amiable and unfortunate James I. of Scotland, who remained here for eighteen years, pouring forth love ditties to the beautiful Jane Beaufort, one of the beauties of the English court, whom he had seen during his confinement, and become enamoured of. Here, also, was imprisoned John, king of France, who was taken by Edward, the Black Prince, at the battle of Poictiers. Nothing can be finer than the effect of this tower, rising above the surrounding buildings, and looking down upon them in a stern silence, as if keeping a perpetual watch over them. Passing to the left of this tower, you enter the upper court of the castle, which is a quadrangle, three sides of which are formed by the different ranges of the royal apartments; the south side is open, and presents another view of the Round Tower, and the country beyond; and in the centre stands a brass equestrian statue of Charles II. This is the only part within the interior walls which presents a regular appearance; and this, like all the rest, is totally free from any attempt at ornament—being built of the same small square unworked stones which form the outer walls and all the other departments of the

building. It is the outer part of this quadrangle which forms the principal object of sight at a distance, as it is built on a rising spot of ground, and presents a regular front to the park, on the extremity of which the whole stands. It is from the centre of this park that the castle can alone be seen to advantage, as a whole; and I should think it is not possible for any class of building to produce a nobler or more characteristic effect than this does, viewed from this particular station. The building itself is square, low, heavy, and solid, both as a whole, and in its separate parts; but any unpleasant effects that might arise from this if it stood on a level ground, are altogether obviated by its rising from the summit of an eminence, the sides of which are made nearly perpendicular, and are also concealed by a projecting terrace which reaches to the level of the park itself on one side, and on the adjoining side by a rich clothing of various trees and shrubs, reaching to a great extent below the foot of the terrace, on account of the eminence on this side descending much lower into the adjacent country than it does on the other. Of the two fronts thus presented to the eye, and standing at right angles with each other, the one which looks immediately up the park is the most regular, and produces the finest general effect. It consists of four perfectly plain square towers, rising

immediately from the terrace that I have before spoken of, and joined to each other by ranges of apartments reaching but half way up the height of the towers, and receding considerably back. The intermediate spaces of ground thus formed, are planted with a few flowering shrubs, which offer the only ornamental appearance that is to be found any where about this noble edifice; and the effect of these is so purely inartificial, and so consistent with the general character of all around, that they would seem to have been cast there by Nature herself, as tributes of praise and admiration to the spirit in which the work has been done. When seen from the park below, these green tresses seem to hang suspended in the air, against the face of the castle; thus producing the effect of a few simple curls, scattered with a studied negligence about the features of a matronly beauty, who is too proud of her charms to choose to attire them in the reigning mode, or perhaps conscious that they would lose their peculiar attraction if she did. There is no denying that the English have a very exquisite, and, indeed, unrivalled taste—or, perhaps, it should rather be called a feeling—as to the value of little natural auxiliaries of this kind, in setting off the effects of art. In fact, their taste in attiring and ornamenting their residences, from the cottage to the palace, is as much superior to ours, as the taste

of our women, in personal attire, is to theirs—which is reaching the climax of comparison at once. Without these little adjuncts, to which I have alluded above, this noble building would, notwithstanding its stately simplicity, present an appearance of cold and bare loneliness, but ill harmonising with the rich and magnificent scenery in the midst of which it is placed; but with these, it becomes united to that scenery, and, as it were, acknowledged as a consistent part of it. The ivy that hangs its luxuriant tresses on two or three of the angles of this proud castle, is the connecting link which marries it to the stately elm-groves, the rich vallies, and lovely meads by which it is surrounded on all sides. From the terrace, which I have said runs round two sides of the castle, there is a noble view of this luxuriant domain, over which it seems to preside like a queen; looking out upon all with an air of quiet dignity, and being looked up to by all as if for countenance and protection. You know how fond I am of forming imaginary unions of this kind; and you will easily believe that I could not help, or rather, that I did not try to help, pursuing my inclination on this occasion. As I paced this terrace, or seated myself listlessly on its parapet, and looked forth on the rich pageant of natural beauty that lay spread out beneath me, I amused myself by fancying a union of the above

kind, by endowing all before and about me with an imaginary life and consciousness, and giving to each and all a separate and appropriate set of feelings, habits, and duties. The castle itself I had before converted into a matronly beauty; I now raised her to the rank of a maiden queen (the Elizabeth) of a smiling and happy realm. The thousand various trees and shrubs that clothed the eminence, formed the court dress of this stately beauty, terminating at the terrace, which seemed to clasp her waist as a zone; the flower-painted meadows that stretched all around, were the rich tapestry of her presence chamber, over which the sky hung like an azure dome; the majestic elms that grew on every side, swept as they were by the passing wind, seemed bowing their heads in token of a courtly homage; the beautiful river that came winding round close to the foot of the eminence, seemed pressing near to pay her willing tribute, and kiss the hem of her royal garment, and then to glide away prouder and happier than before. The rest of the scenery I likened to the more distant spectators, who were silently waiting their turn to approach her, or modestly content to remain within the ken of her eye and the light of her countenance. The most conspicuous object among these, is the exquisite gothic hall of Eton College, which rises at a little distance like a

religious temple. For this I could find no appropriate similitude. The best I could do was to liken it to a beautiful devotee, vowed and dedicated to unearthly thoughts, and "with looks commercing with the skies," yet choosing to place herself in the presence of majesty, in order occasionally to remind it that there is a kingdom not of this world.

It was on Sunday that I visited Windsor; and the Chapel Royal of St. George, the patron saint of England, being open to the public during divine service, I went in: for you must know, that I visited this castle, as I have hitherto done most of the sights of London, without any cicerone. I am aware that I lose something by following this plan; but I am pretty certain that I gain much more than I lose. The external part of this gothic cathedral (for such it is, though on a very small scale) is, as I mentioned to you before, exceedingly perfect of its kind; but the interior is still finer and more complete. The choir, in particular, presents a most gorgeous and imposing spectacle. Being used for the installation of the Knights of the Garter, the most distinguished of the English orders of knighthood, the stalls of the knights are ranged on each side of the choir, beginning immediately at the entrance. These stalls are thirty in number, and reach more than half way to the altar. They are of the most florid gothic in

design; and are formed of British oak, elaborately carved in every part, very darkly stained, so as to be almost black, and highly polished or varnished. Each is surmounted by a canopy of the same design and material, on which are placed the sword, helmet, crest, and mantle of the knight to which the stall is appropriated; and immediately above this canopy hangs the knight's banner, with his arms, &c. richly emblazoned on it. The solemn character of this part of the choir itself, and of the altar and roof, which are of similar workmanship, blended and contrasted with the gorgeous effect of the painted banners, embroidered mantles, and glittering swords and helmets, and the whole scene dimly lighted by a magnificent painted window, which occupies the whole end of the choir above the altar—produce altogether a most rich and appropriate impression—a calling forth and blending together of a host of high and animating associations, drawn from those somewhat rude, but highly poetical times, when religion and chivalry divided the national mind between them. Filled, and to a certain degree agitated as my mind was, by the presence of these associations—which came trooping upon it from its favourite storehouse of imaginations and fancies—nothing could be finer than the effect of the great organ, which now suddenly pealed forth its rich

tones, accompanied by the sweet voices of the choristers chaunting the service of the day. The latter influence seemed now to take possession of my spirit wholly, steeping it in that vague and inexpressive feeling of voluptuous pleasure, which is perhaps the most rare and enviable state of which the human mind is susceptible; when all distinct thought is merged and melted down into mere sensation; when both the memory and imagination are gradually thrown into a deep slumber; sensation seeming to begin, continue, and end in itself alone. It is remarkable that this kind of pleasure always generates a disposition to shed tears; which are, in fact, after the mind has reached a certain stage of strength and refinement, always the accompaniments of intense pleasure, and never of pain.

Before quitting this most impressive spot, I cannot help noticing the admirable propriety and decorum which are observed in conducting the public worship in this country; and which I have frequently had occasion to observe elsewhere than here. But even here, where it may naturally be supposed that a great portion of the congregation are attracted by curiosity rather than devotional feelings, there is not the slightest appearance of any one forgetting the object to which the place is dedicated. There is no going in and out during

the service—no whispering, or walking about on tiptoe—no gazing around at the numerous objects of attraction that present themselves on all sides. And if, unlike what may sometimes be observed in our own religious temples, there is little appearance of that deep devotion during which the worshipper seems wrapt away from this world, and all things appertaining to it; yet, unlike ours also, there is nothing approaching to that disgusting and unnatural indifference, which makes the church a public thoroughfare from one part of the city to another, or even a place of open amusement or assignation. As a specimen of the scrupulous manner in which this order and regularity are preserved, I may mention that, during the service in the above chapel, while standing in the outward aisle, I had inadvertently taken out my note book to make a remark in it; when an official person belonging to the place stepped up, and begged me to desist, informing me that I was infringing the rules and regulations of the place. In one of our churches the same person would have stepped up to me in the same manner; but it would have been to enquire whether he should shew or explain to me any of the curiosities of the place.

In passing through the state apartments of Windsor Castle, nothing presents itself particularly worthy of notice, except a few very fine

pictures; the apartments themselves being inferior, both in extent and magnificence, to most of the royal palaces that I have seen elsewhere. And even the pictures that claim particular attention, are very few indeed. The finest are two by Guido; Venus attired by the Graces, and Perseus and Andromeda. Both of these are painted in a very grand style; and the Venus and Graces is, perhaps, one of Guido's very highest works: it is full of a rich and harmonious sweetness, joined to a voluptuous tenderness, the effects of which are very striking and poetical. The Andromeda is also painted with a grandeur of outline, and a force of colouring, which this artist did not often reach, or even attempt. The Judith with the head of Holofernes, by the same artist, though charmingly painted, has not much more force of expression than the Venus. Guido could seldom get beyond an expression of soft and voluptuous sorrow, little adapted to subjects of high tragic interest. The Andromeda is very defective in this respect. There is A. Caracci's celebrated picture of Silence, which I cannot think answers to the high reputation it bears; but there is one by Spagnoletti, of Duns Scotus finishing his translation of the Bible, which is exceedingly intense and fine. The only others by the old masters which struck me as remarkable, are a most lovely St.

Catherine, by Correggio; a splended portrait of Titian and Aretine, by Titian; and the celebrated Misers, by Quintin Matsys; which latter is equal to what Raphael would have painted on a similar subject, and is indeed very strikingly assimilated to his style. But perhaps the most interesting treasures of art which this palace possesses, are the admirable portraits of English Kings, Princes, Nobility, &c. chiefly painted by Sir Peter Lely, and Sir Godfrey Kneller. Among these the most conspicuous are the celebrated beauties of Charles the Second's court. These are all contained in one room, and exhibit such a constellation of female charms as, perhaps, was never before assembled together.

Returning once more to the outside of this noble edifice, it is impossible enough to admire the curious neatness, finish, and consistency that pervade very part of it. It has evidently been constructed at various periods, and consequently under the direction of various persons; and even in its first erection no regular plan seems to have been pursued, or at least laid down beforehand—the different departments being added, altered, or adapted, as occasion or fancy might suggest. But still, so uniformly consistent has been the spirit in which every thing has been done, that every part of it perfectly harmonises with all the rest; and

if it were not known that this castle has been the favourite summer residence of the British monarchs for six or seven hundred years past, and that almost every one of them has had a hand in bringing it to its present state, one might suppose it to have been just now designed and completed—so fresh and perfect is every part of it. I believe, in the present instance, this is to be attributed to the particular care and attention bestowed on Windsor Castle by the late King, during the greater part of his life. But it seems that, since the peace, the government of this country have been alive to the policy of making the metropolis, and its environs, as attractive and complete in their external character as circumstances will admit; and they have, accordingly, set on foot a great variety of extensive and admirable improvements, and have also directed several repairs and renewals, which were no less necessary than they are effective. Thus the splendid gothic Cathedral of Westminster, has, at a vast expence, been lately placed in nearly as perfect a state as when it was first erected; and the space about it has been cleared of houses, &c. so that there is now a full view of it from various points. The noble Gothic Hall of Westminster is also undergoing a similar renewal and improvement; and this part of the metropolis may be expected in a few years to

present an aspect capable of rivalling that of most other capital cities of Europe, though it can never attain that character of at once picturesqueness, splendour, and uniformity, which belongs to some of the coups-d'œil of Paris; such as the Place de Louis XV., the Quais des Tuilleries, &c.

Like Fontainbleau, and other royal palaces in France, Windsor has an extensive forest attached to it, where the king and court were accustomed, till within these few years, to pursue the sports of the field; and for once, and in a case of this kind, I must decidedly prefer the artificial to the natural mode of laying out domains like those in question. I cannot forget the rich solemnity of effect produced on my mind, whenever I ride through the forest of Fontainbleau; and I confess that no such effect was produced by that which I have just visited. At Fontainbleau, the immense masses of trees, regularly planted, and so closely as to cause a perpetual twilight when once you have entered the boundaries of the forest, and each mass being divided from the others by narrow glades, to which the eye can distinguish no termination; the constant murmur of the ocean of leaves, even when the air is still, and the solemn flood of sound ceaselessly rushing on when there is a breeze stirring; the stately deer, passing at intervals through the distant gloom, like the hauntings spirits of the place; the

darkness-loving birds, singing with what I could fancy to be a kind of regal richness of tone; even the grass and weeds which have never seen the sun's face, and which yet seem to have reached a grandeur of growth that I have not noticed elsewhere;—all this, seen and felt at a distance from any human abode, or from any objects that can suggest associations connected with human society, has always produced an impression on me, superior in kind to any I have ever experienced, and exactly analogous to that which I am accustomed to receive from the sight and sound of the ocean at night, when the winds are communing with it, or from the tones of an organ suddenly pealing and reverberating through the aisles of a great cathedral. But nothing of this sort has occurred to me in visiting Windsor Forest. It is, in fact, with the exception of a noble avenue of trees at the chief entrance, a domain created, cultivated, and kept in order by Nature alone; and as such, it produces those delightful and appropriate effects, which should result from scenery of this kind, and which may be experienced in a thousand other spots of a similar kind in all countries. But Fontainbleau, and some other of the royal forests of France, such as Compiegne, &c. have a character entirely their own, and produce impressions when they are present to us, and recollections when we are

away from them, which are not only highly valuable in their nature, but which cannot be procured from any other source.

I cannot take a final leave of this most interesting spot, without letting my thoughts recur for a moment to the scenes which have glorified and graced it in times past; and which scenes and times no concurrence of circumstances can ever bring back to us. Here the genius of chivalry reigned in the fullest pomp of its power, and revelled in its gayest and most gallant lustre; and here the shadow of it still presides, but over a shadowy realm, a vacant altar, and a neglected shrine. Here, in consequence of a happy accident in the loss and finding of a lady's garter, at one of the royal festivals that were so frequently given in this palace—here was offered that fine homage to the influence of female charms, the institution of the Garter order of knighthood. Here, in these courtly halls, or echoing courts, or in the fancy-peopled solitudes belonging to them,—either beneath the "pillared shade" of the stately elms, or in the open champaigne adjoining, as the mood of his spirit might direct,—here the gallant and chivalrous, yet tender and melancholy Surrey used to wander listlessly about, meditating love-lays that might win to his arms the lovely Lady Geraldine, who was the first object of his youth-

ful passion. Here that other princely lover, as romantic and poetical as Surrey, but infinitely less fortunate— that double captive at once to love and policy—his body even a closer prisoner than his mind—here the amiable monarch of Scotland passed the whole of his youthful years, from their first early spring, at thirteen, to their final close at thirty. Here he used to lie in his bed and read Bœotius's Consolations of Philosophy, till he could half forget that he was either a monarch or a captive; and here, when the philosophy of reason failed to comfort him, he flew to the still better philosophy of poetry and love, and found what he sought. Gazing from the window of his prison on the gardens beneath, he saw the beautiful Lady Jane Beaufort wandering among the flowers, the loveliest of them all; and in his situation, to see such a lady, was to love her; and with his elegant and romantic mind, to love such a lady was to feel that he had need be something more than a king, to deserve and win her: so he became a poet; and he did win her and his liberty together, and made her his queen; and a devoted and happy pair they remained, till the basest of conspiracies, to which he fell a victim some time after, tore them asunder; when this romantic love had an end worthy of its beginning, by the lady throwing herself as a protect-

ing shield before the person of her lord, and receiving on her tender body the murderous blows that were directed at his—but receiving them in vain! Here, on these lordly terraces, one of which was erected by herself, the truly royal Elizabeth, that queen of queens, used to walk for an hour daily, meditating on the glory and happiness of her realm, and doubtless mingling thoughts of love and pleasure with those of duty and good government.

Finally, and to pass over all intermediate recollections, here, on this same terrace, the most worthy and respectable, but least chivalrous of monarchs, George the Third, used to walk every Sunday, in company with his subjects, frequently entering into familiar conversation with the meanest of them; and here, confined to one set of apartments for a series of weary years, he remained an unconscious prisoner, blind, helpless, and a maniac, obliged to be treated as a wayward infant by his own offspring, and commanded by his own servants!

I will confess to you, that, in quitting Windsor Castle, and recollecting that I should probably never look forth from its lordly terrace, or pace its majestic courts again, a feeling of regret came over me, that I have never before experienced in quitting a spot of the kind; and as royal palaces are, in general, far from being rich in associations among which my

mind delights to dwell, I must attribute this feeling to the peculiar character of the present one, and to its necessarily throwing back the imagination to the most poetical times which modern Europe has ever known.

V S.

END OF VOL. I.